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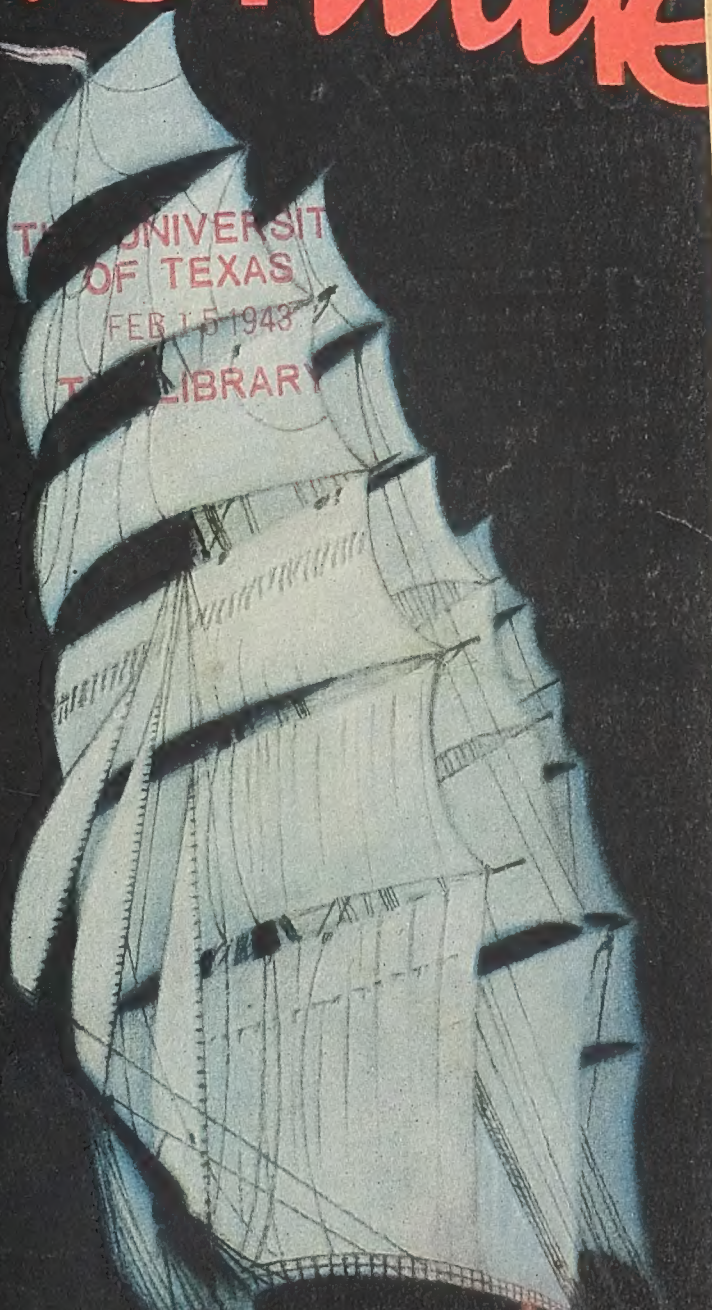

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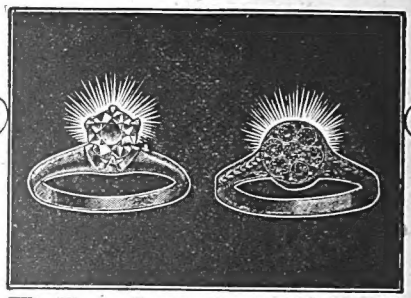

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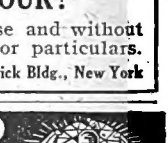

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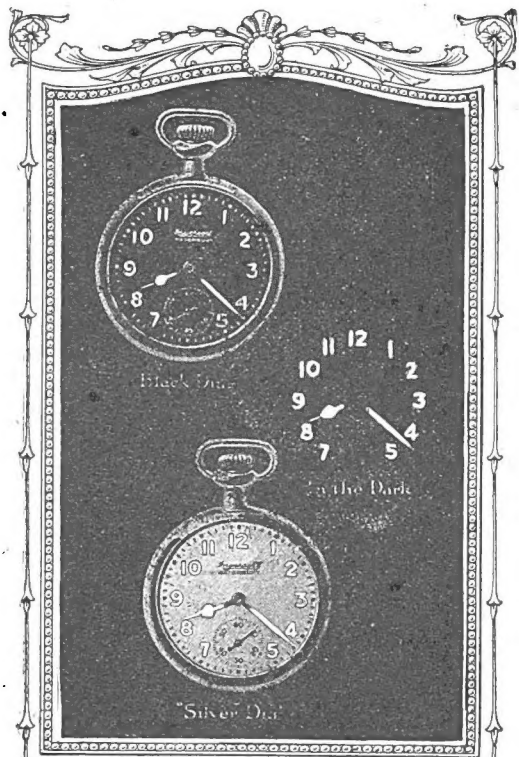

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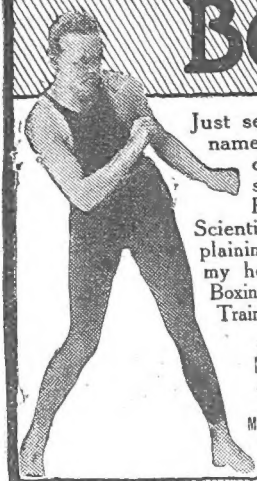

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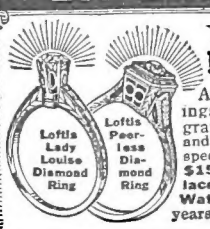

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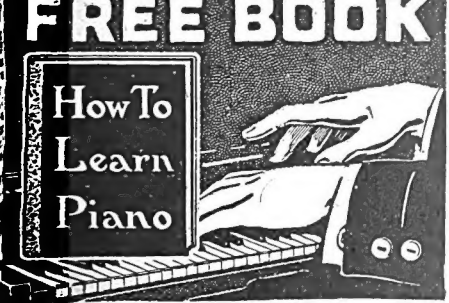

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Marcus Lucius Quinn Conservatory of Music,
Studio A5, 598 Columbia Road, BOSTON, 25, MASS.

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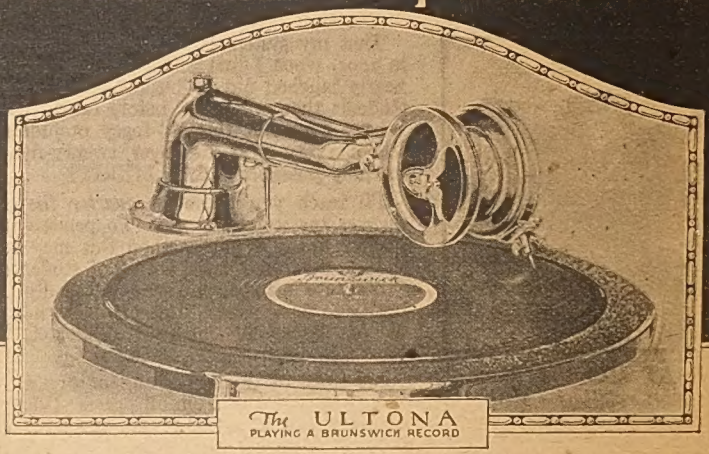

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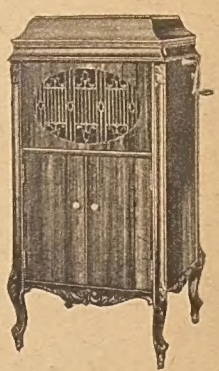

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

IN DAYS now luckily past there dwelt in India a band of master robbers whose strength shook the foundations of empire. The Mogul turned for aid to *Abdul Dost*, first swordsman of Hindustan, and *Khlit*, master of strategy from the steppes of Tatary. "The Masterpiece of Death," a complete novelette by Harold Lamb, in our next issue.

IN THE desolate sands of Lower California *Chet Overman* discovers a treasure whose possession leads him through strange adventures with the Japanese mouse-worshipers. "Toyama," a five-part story by Patrick Casey, begins in our next issue.

IN AFRICA two white men set out over unexplored mountains to find the sender of a mysterious appeal for help. "The Bowl of Alabaster," a complete novelette by Charles Beadle, in our next issue.

Other stories in the Mid-September Adventure *are described on the last page of this issue.*

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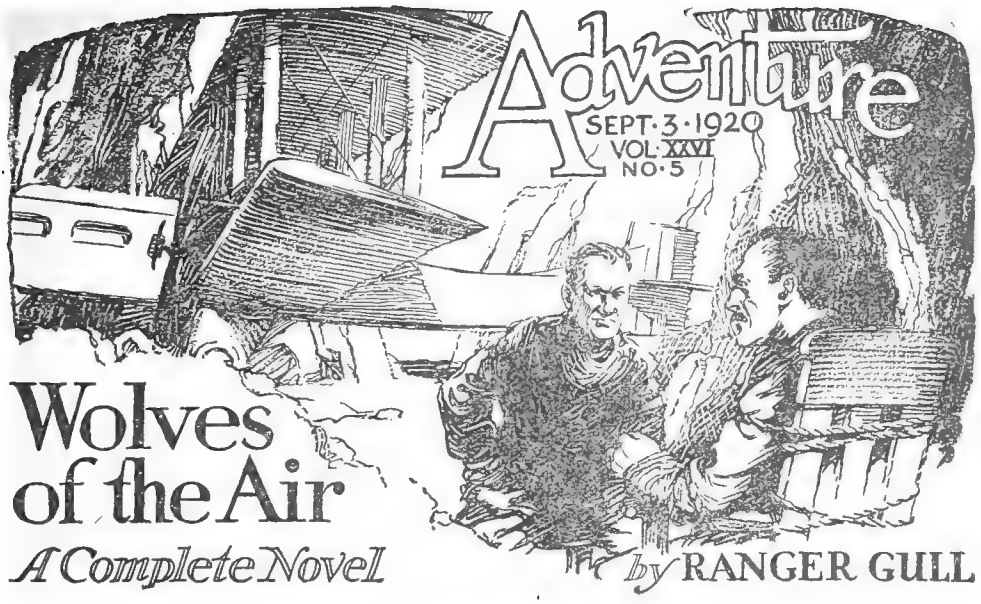

Wolves of the Air

A Complete Novel

by RANGER GULL

CHAPTER I

THE COMMISSIONER OF AIR POLICE FOR GREAT BRITAIN RIDES TO PLYMOUTH IN GOOD COMPANY

NEARLY two years ago a leading London daily newspaper said:

"The Government have assured us that all danger from present and future air piracies is now over and that the recent events which so startled and horrified both this country and the United States of America can never recur. For our own part we accept that assurance and we do not think that the Commissioner of Air Police for the British Government will be caught napping again.

"In saying this we do not in the least mean to imply that Sir John Custance could have either foreseen or prevented the astounding midatlantic tragedies. Sir John, though barely thirty years of age, is an official in every way worthy of his high position, an organizer of exceptional ability and a pilot of practical experience. Press and public are perfectly well aware that it is owing to his personal exertions that our magnificent transatlantic air liners are no longer stricken down by the Night Terror of the immediate past. And in saying this much we have both a suggestion and a request to make.

"The inner history of the piracies is only fully known to one man. It is a story, we understand, that puts the imagination of the boldest writer of fiction to shame. Such parts of it as have been made public hint at a story of absorbing interest behind.

"The bad old days of censorship and secrecy have vanished with the occasions that made them necessary. We suggest that a full and detailed story of the first—and we trust the last—air pirate should be written and given to the world. And we call upon that most popular public man, Sir John Custance, to do this for us. He alone knows everything."

At the time that it appeared I read the above to Charles Thumbwood, my little valet, as I finished breakfast in my Half-Moon Street Chambers.

"Not quite correct, Charles. You know almost as much about it as I do—to say nothing of a certain friend——"

"I wouldn't say that, Sir John," said Charles, brushing my light overcoat, "though I rode part of the course alongside you—to say nothing of Mr. Danjuro."

Thumbwood was a jockey before I took him into my service.

"Are you going to write it all down, Sir John?"

"That depends on several things, and on one person especially. I must think it all over."

Think it over I did as I drove to my offices in Whitehall—the Scotland Yard of the air—and I discussed it afterward with a certain lady.

Which is how the following narrative came to be written, though I did not complete it until the best part of two years had elapsed.

I NEVER did any flying during the Great War. I was too young, being only fifteen and at Eton when peace was signed. But from the very earliest days that I can remember aviation fascinated me as nothing else could.

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My father, the first baronet, left me a moderate fortune. He died when I was eighteen, and instead of going to Oxford I entered as a cadet in the R. F. C. It is not necessary to detail how, when I had earned my wings, I joined the civil side of flying and became a pilot-commander in the Transatlantic Service.

I had a good deal of influence behind me, and to cut a long story short at twenty-eight I was Assistant, and at thirty Chief Commissioner of the British Air Police. I was answerable to Government alone, and, within its limits, my powers were absolute.

It was on a morning in late June, the 25th to be exact, when the wheels began to move. I date the start of everything from that morning.

About one o'clock on the preceding night Thumbwood had waked me from refreshing sleep. A wireless message in code had been received at Whitehall. It was addressed to me personally, and was from the Controller of the White Star Air Line at Plymouth. My people at Whitehall on night duty thought it of sufficient importance to send on even at this hour.

As soon as I was thoroughly awake and had done cursing Thumbwood I read the message. It only said that a matter of the gravest importance required my personal presence at Plymouth, and would I come down at once.

Now considerable experience of the fussy great men who controlled the air-line companies which linked up England with all parts of the world had made me somewhat skeptical of these urgent demands for my presence. More than once I had to explain that I was not at the beck and call of any commercial magnate, and if I had made myself disliked in certain quarters I had at least made my office respected.

Accordingly I scribbled instructions to the chief inspector on duty that he should send a wireless to Plymouth requesting further details. Then I went to sleep again.

As a matter of fact I *was* going to Plymouth the next morning in any case, though on private business. Sir Joshua Johnson, Controller of the White Star Line, did not of course know that. His midnight message was a coincidence.

I could have flown down from Whitehall in my fast police yacht in an hour, but as it happened I was going to train from Paddington. Sir Joshua could wait until I turned up some time after lunch.

How well I remember the morning of my departure from town. The long departure platform at Paddington was crowded with well-dressed, happy-looking people, as I stood by the door of my reserved carriage in the Riviera Express—that superb train, with its curved roof, which runs to Plymouth without a stop.

Thumbwood, invaluable little man, filled the carriage with flowers, great bunches of white lilac and June roses, and the stationmaster, who came up for a chat, looked curiously at the bower my valet had made. The Chief Commissioner of Air Police was not wont to travel like that!

For my part I was wildly exhilarated, and at the same time as nervous as a boy making his first flight. Today might prove one of the happiest or quite the most miserable of my life. I was going to put it to the test. Confound it, why didn't Connie come?

On the morning Miss Constance Shepherd, the young light-comedy actress, adored of London, and to me the rose of all the roses, was traveling down to Plymouth to catch the air liner starting from that port to New York at eighty-thirty this evening. And she had promised to travel with me!

Would she have done so, I kept on asking myself, if she didn't know quite well what I meant to say to her? Or was it just friendliness? I knew she liked me.

Why didn't she come? Here it was, only eight minutes before the train started. As I searched the platform with an eye that strove to appear calm and unconcerned I saw faces that I knew—faces of theatrical celebrities, two or three of the prettiest girls of England; a handsome, hook-nosed young man who was perhaps the best known theatrical manager in London; two eminent comedians carrying bouquets. And the press photographers were beginning to arrange their cameras.

I had completely forgotten what a tremendous celebrity dear little Connie was. I might have known they'd have given her a send-off on her way to the States. All the same it annoyed me, as it seemed to be annoying a tall, hatchet-faced man in Donegal tweeds, who scowled at the little crowd. Was he a friend too, I wondered?

SHE came at last, very late of course, and after a brief smile at me underwent the public ceremonies of the occasion, while I—I own it—retired into the carriage for a minute or two. But I saw the cameras click, and the girls embrace, and the crowd of sightseers trying to push into the charmed circle, and then Connie was in the corridor, leaning out of the window, waving and smiling as the train began to move to an accompaniment of loud cheers.

"My dear Connie, royalty isn't in it!" I said as she stepped laughingly into the carriage and I pushed the sliding door home.

"Oh, they're dears!" she said. "And they do really mean well, despite the fact that we shall all be in the picture papers tomorrow morning, and that's good for business."

"I thought you were never coming."

"It is an impression I convey," she answered; "but I'm very careful, really. My maid was here with the luggage half an hour ago. What lovely flowers you have got for me, John!"

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She lay back in her seat as the train gathered speed and Ealing flashed by with a roar, and I feasted my eyes on the fairest picture in the world.

She wore a simple traveling-coat and skirt of white piqué, and the white lilac was all about her, framing her face as she held up a branch to inhale its fragrance. All England knew that face in the days when little Connie sang and danced herself into the heart of the public, but none knew it so well as I.

How can I describe that marvelous hair of dark chestnut, those deep amethyst eyes and the perfect bow of lips which were truer to the exact color of coral than any I have ever seen? It makes only a catalog after all. It's the expression—the soul, if you like—that makes the true face; and here was one so frank and kind and sweet that when one looked it seemed as if hands were placed beneath the heart, lifting it up!

On one other day only did I see her more lovely than she was now.

Well, it was too early to say what I wanted to say, and besides I was nervous as yet. We hadn't settled down.

As I expected, her breakfast had consisted of tea and a macaroon, so I produced a basket—lunch was to come later—in which a silver box of caviar sandwiches was surrounded by crushed ice in a larger box of zinc. There was also iced hock and seltzer water. We both felt more at home in a few minutes.

We had lit our cigarets and I was thinking hard when some one passing along the corridor looked in upon us for a moment. I had an impression of a brown face and a scowl. It was the man in tweeds that I had noticed at Paddington.

"That beast!" said Connie suddenly.

I turned and looked at her. She was frowning adorably, and I thought she looked rather pale.

"D'you know him, then?"

"I did, and I simply hate him."

"Who is he?"

"I expect you've heard his name, John. Most people have in town. He is Henry Helzephron, a big man in your way once."

I *did* know the name as that of a pilot of extraordinary courage and ability during the Great War. He had gained the Victoria Cross when a lad of twenty, and his exploits during two wonderful years formed part of the history of aviation.

He had not flown for years now, and divided his time between the more dissipated haunts of the West End and an estate he had somewhere in Devon or Cornwall, a "has-been" with a sinister reputation, a lounger of forty or so.

"I know. 'Hawk' Helzephron he used to be called. Gone all to pieces, I understand. But how do you know him, dear?"

"He did me the honor to ask me to marry him about two months ago," she answered, "and since then he is always putting himself in my way. He does not speak, but he comes to the theater and glares. I am always meeting him, and I hate the sight of him. He makes me afraid."

Here was my chance and I took it like a shot. She should never be unprotected from Helzephrons and all the tribe who haunt the stage door any more!

A successful aviator takes instantaneous decisions. He must. If he hesitates he's lost.

What I said as the Riviera Express hurled itself through the Summer noon is not part of this narrative. I daresay I was no more original than most men, but the results were eminently satisfactory, for as we ran past the towers and winding river of Exeter Connie and I were engaged.

I remember that I lugged the ring out of my waistcoat pocket—sapphires and diamonds, a top-shelf ring!—precisely as we glided through Exeter Station.

"O-oh!" said Connie as the thing winked and shone in the sunlight; and then:

"You wretch! I'll never forgive you—never!"

I wondered what was the matter. In fact I asked her.

"You made so sure of me that you actually bought this beforehand!"

"It doesn't do to leave anything to chance," I said, and I made her put it on and gave her several other things of no particular importance while she was doing it.

For the rest of the journey, past the red cliffs and blue seas of Teignmouth and Paignton, we had a long and happy talk, finding out—of course—all sorts of delightful things about each other which we had only suspected before.

Perhaps there is nothing fresher and more delightful in life than those first few hours of revelation, when a man and a girl who love each other have at last become engaged. It is like coming into harbor after an anxious voyage, and yet all the time there is the splendid knowledge that there are new and marvelous seas waiting to be explored, this time—together!

CONNIE was to act in New York for a month and in Boston for a fortnight. It was a "star" engagement, and six weeks would soon pass. Besides, now that Plymouth was barely thirty hours from New York there was nothing to prevent me from popping over once or twice to see her. I was responsible to no one for my time, and half a dozen quite real matters in connection with my job would provide a valid excuse. After the six weeks were over, why then we would be married!

"There is absolutely no reason on earth why we should wait," I told her in sublime ignorance of what the Fates had in store for both of us.

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"I'll have a special license ready, and the day you land again on this side you shall be Lady Custance, darling!"

So it was settled lightly and happily enough, and when we left the train at Plymouth Station. there was not a cloud in the sky or in our hearts.

I found that Mr. Thumbwood had been making excellent use of his time, even as his master had, for the little man was assisting a demure and well-looking maiden to collect luggage, who turned out to be Connie's maid, Wilson.

We left them to it and drove to the Royal Hotel, not before I had seen the train start again on its journey to Cornwall, with Mr. Helzephron—whom I had quite forgotten—standing in the corridor and regarding us with a malignant scowl upon his hawk-like, dissipated countenance. But Mr. Helzephron and all other men alive were about six a penny to me just then.

Connie was to leave the sea-drome at eight-thirty in that fine flying liner *Atlantis*. She was a Royal Mail ship, and about the fastest and finest flyer in the transatlantic service, with a carrying capacity of three hundred and fifty passengers and a thousand tons dead weight of cargo. Her crew numbered forty, and she was commanded by Captain Swainson, one of the most reliable pilot commanders in the air. He was a man I both knew and liked.

Connie wanted a rest and a sleep.

"At least, I want to be alone to think it all over!" she said, so she went up to her room in the hotel at once.

I arranged to call for her at five, when we would go for a stroll and afterward have an early dinner. Then I washed my hands and strolled into the famous long bar of the hotel for a sandwich and a whisky and soda before proceeding to the offices of the White Star Line on the Hoe.

As I munched my sandwich I wondered what the affair was that had made Sir Joshua Johnson send me a wireless message in the middle of the night—a time when obese old gentlemen should be fast asleep in bed. I had told my people at Whitehall to ask for further particulars, but I had not the least intention of being bothered with them—or any police business whatever—until I had settled my own personal affairs with Connie. Accordingly when I left my chambers in the morning to go to Paddington I sent a message to Whitehall to say that I was proceeding to Plymouth during the day, and would wait till my arrival to hear what the business was. Muir Lockhart, my assistant, would perfectly understand and was quite capable of dealing with anything that might come along.

The long bar was, as usual, full of naval officers, with a sprinkling of air merchant service men in their uniform of gray, silver and light blue. I saw no one that I knew until the swing-doors leading into the hotel were flung open and a wiry little man in the black and silver uniform of my own corps came hurriedly in.

His peaked cap with the silver wings and sword badge was pushed back on his head, and he was in a state of unenviable heat and perspiration.

He was Pilot Superintendent Lashmar, chief of the ocean patrol stationed at Plymouth, with equal rank to a lieutenant-commander in the navy, and one of my most trusted officers in the West.

He went up to the bar and ordered a "long glass of iced ginger-beer with a dash of gin in it," and then I clapped him on the shoulder. He wheeled round in a second, and when he saw who it was his face changed from anxiety to relief.

"Thank Heaven you're come, sir," he said as he saluted. "We've been signaling to Whitehall all the morning, and all we could get was that you were on your way. I've been backwards and forwards from the A. P. Headquarters to the White Star office a dozen times."

"I came down by train, Mr. Lashmar," I said, realizing in an instant that there really was something important afoot and that by bad luck I was behind time.

Sir Joshua Johnson was all very well, but when my own people began to send out signals—that was quite another matter.

"We thought you'd fly down in the yacht, sir, and we've been sending wireless trying to pick you up."

"I couldn't. I have had some most important business to attend to. Anyhow I'm here now. What's it all about?"

"You haven't heard anything, sir?" he asked in amazement.

Again I cursed my luck, but I wasn't going to give it away.

"We'll go around to Sir Joshua Johnson at once," was all I said.

"That will be best, sir, and then every detail can be put before you in sequence. I have my report with me, written up to date. I think I've taken all possible measures up to the present, but of course we've been waiting for you. Sir Joshua, as you may imagine, is half out of his wits."

"He's not had very far to travel then," I said to gain time.

All this was so much Greek to me, and I had to walk warily.

In a minute more Lashmar and I were on the Hoe and approaching the stately offices of the line, which stood in the very center of that famous promenade above the blue waters of the sound.

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CHAPTER II

FATE OF THE TRANSATLANTIC AIR LINER *"Albatros"*

THERE were a good many people in both the anteroom and the secretaries' room as I was led to Sir Joshua. I was immediately aware of an unusual stir and excitement, and people nodded and whispered as I passed.

"That's Sir John Custance, the Police Commissioner." "I expect there's some news," were two of the *sotto-voce* remarks I heard.

Sir Joshua sat in his own magnificent apartment with the great window looking out over Drake's Island and Mount Edgcombe to the horizon. A tray and a decanter showed that he had lunched there, and there was a good deal of cigar-smoke in the air.

Sir Joshua was a tall and corpulent man of nearly seventy with a red face with little purple veins in the cheeks, a thatch of snow-white hair and close whiskers. He had been an early pioneer of commerical flying, and had reaped his reward in the control of the finest air fleet in the world and the Lord knows how many millions of money. He was distinctly an able and upright man, and his only faults were a slight pomposity and a mistaken idea that the Commissioner of A. P. for Great Britain was a sort of unpaid official of the White Star Line. A good many of the great air-shipping magnates had tried to take that line in the past—and been snubbed for their pains.

Sir Joshua was not pompous this afternoon, and his face was twitching as he shook hands.

"Thank God you're come, Sir John," he said. "I am almost out of my mind with worry and anxiety. You will agree with me that this affair is as grave as it well can be?"

To that I was diplomatically silent. What I said was:

"I have seen Pilot Superintendent Lashmar. What I want now, Sir Joshua, as a preliminary, is a brief and exact account from your own lips."

"Sit down," he said, pushing a padded chair toward me and handing a box of cigars. "You shall have it in a nutshell."

He sat down opposite to me, pulled some papers toward him with a hand that shook a little and began to read.

"OUR liner *Albatros*, carrying the mails, left New York yesterday morning about 7 A.M. American time. She was consequently due here at Plymouth about six-thirty this afternoon—Greenwich. The weather conditions at the ten thousand feet mail-ship level were perfect.

"In addition to the mails there were about two hundred passengers, and she carried, though this was known only to a few officials, a parcel of particularly fine Brazilian diamonds, consigned from Tiffany's of New York to Aaron Harris, the dealers in precious stones, of Hatton Garden. The jewels were in the ship's safe, in charge of the purser.

"Various ships—I have the full list—sighted the *Albatros* during the day and exchanged signals, while she duly reported herself by wireless as she passed each lightship, as soon as dusk fell. The lightships, as you know, are a hundred miles apart from the Fastnet to Long Island and are connected by cable with our telegraph room here.

"The indicating dials register, degree by geographical degree, the exact position of any of our ships when in the air. This printed record is on a tape beneath each dial, and each record is examined every hour or two by a clerk."

Of course I knew all this. The minutest detail of the system was familiar. I wished that Sir Joshua would "cut the cackle and come to the 'osses." No doubt my face showed something of what I felt, for Sir Joshua half-apologized.

"You see, Sir John," he said, "I thought it best to prepare some sort of short and coherent statement for the press. As yet they have got hold of nothing, but we can't possibly keep it much longer. Even you couldn't, with all your powers. And what I am reading is this statement. I particularly want you to hear it as of course it rests with you if it shall be published in this form or not."

I bowed, and Sir Joshua continued:

"At ten o'clock last night the clerk on duty examined the tapes. When he came to the one recording the progress of the *Albatros* he found that for two hours there was no record of her at all. The last record was that she had passed and signaled to Lightship A. 70 that all was well. A two hour's gap is so unusual, owing to the—er—perfection of our organization, that the clerk was alarmed, and reported the matter to a superior up-stairs.

"A general call to all our ships in the air at that moment was at once sent out, and in a few minutes responses were received from several of them to the effect that the *Albatros* had not been sighted. Nor was there any answer from the ship herself. A signal to Lightship A. 71, the next guide-boat the *Albatros* should have passed, elicited the information that she had never done so.

"By eleven o'clock all these facts were known in this office. The night staff here became seriously alarmed.

"By a fortunate coincidence I was attending a performance at the Theater Royal close by, with Lady Johnson and my daughters. This was known, and a messenger caught me at the close of the play, and I came round at once. I had not been in the offices for five minutes

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when news of the most extraordinary and sensational character began to come in from our receiving-station by the Citadel.

"Captain Pring, one of our most reliable pilot commanders, was in charge of the *Albatros*. The message was from him, and this is the gist of it:

"At sundown the *Albatros* was flying on the ten-thousand-foot level. The lightship A. 70 was some twenty miles astern. No other airships were in sight, when the lookout man reported a boat coming up at great speed from the east.

"The *Albatros* was doing her steady ninety knots, but as the two ships approached it was seen that the stranger, a much smaller boat, was flying at an almost incredible rate. Pring reports that she was doing a sixteen to eighteen second mile, but there is doubtless a mistake in the message.

"The boat showed no distinguishing lights, and failed to signal as she flashed past the liner at the distance of half a mile. There were several curious features about her which attracted attention, though what these were we do not yet know.

"This strange ship turned and came up with the *Albatros*, actually flying round her in spirals with the greatest ease. Then without the slightest warning she opened fire on our vessel, and the first shell, obviously by design, blew away our wireless."

MY HEART simply bounded within me. This was news with a vengeance! I had to exercise all my self-control not to pour out a stream of frantic questions.

It was beyond thinking! Such a thing had not happened since the League of Nations came into being. It might mean hideous war once more—anything!

Sir Joshua had paused to drink a glass of water. He understood the immense gravity of this news as well as I did, and his voice was unsteady as he went on in answer to my nod:

"The *Albatros* was helpless. Since the international agreement that only naval, military and police ships may fly armed, she had no possible means of defense. Flight even was impossible, and the loss of her wireless forbade her to summon help.

"Then the anonymous ship turned a machine gun on her rudder and shot it out of gear. There was nothing for it but to descend to the water and rest on her floats.

"Pring was forced to give the order, and she planed down. The other ship followed and took the water not two hundred yards away.

"She then signaled in Morse code with a klaxon horn that she was sending men aboard the *Albatros*, and that if the captain or crew offered the slightest resistance she'd blow her to pieces. They launched a Berthon collapsible boat from a door in the stern fuselage. There were four men in her, all armed with large-caliber automatic pistols, and wearing pilot's hoods and masks with talc eye-pieces, so that it was impossible to identify them.

"Pring could do nothing at all. He had the passengers to consider.

"These ruffians cleared out the safe and the women's jewel-cases—they left the mails alone—and in ten minutes they were back again with the loot. The ship lifted and went off in the dark at two hundred miles an hour, leaving the *Albatros* helpless upon the water.

"It was a business of several hours to rig up a makeshift rudder, but fortunately her searchlights were all right, and she kept on signaling with these until she was sighted by a big cargo-steamer, a Baltimore-to-Cadiz boat, coming up from the south, the *Sant Iago*. She took off the passengers and is bringing them home; she's only a fifteen-knot boat, but I have already dispatched one of our smaller liners to pick her up and take the passengers aboard. They ought to be here some time tomorrow.

"The *Sant Iago* has wireless, and was able to communicate not only with us but also with the air-yacht *May Flower*, which she sighted on the four-thousand-foot level at dawn. The *May Flower* belongs to Mr. Van Adams, the Philadelphia millionaire, who is crossing to England with a party of friends.

"She came down to the water and took up Commander Pring and the second officer, and should be here by tea-time this afternoon. Then we shall know more of this unprecedented, this deplorable business."

"And the *Albatros*, Sir Joshua?"

"A small crew was left on her, and an emergency tender and workmen started at dawn. She ought to be flying again tonight."

I had all the available facts at last, and long before Sir Joshua had finished my mind was busy as a mill. There was going to be the very biggest sort of commotion over this. England and America would be in a blaze of fury within twenty-four hours, and every flying man, from skippers of the lordly London-Brindisi-Bombay boats or the Transatlantic Line to the sporting commerical traveler in a second-hand 50 h.p. trussed-girder blow-fly, would be wagging the admonishing finger at me.

"Thank you, Sir Joshua. Most lucid, if I may say so. As a clear statement of fact, combined with a sense of vivid narrative, your account could hardly be improved on."

"You think, Sir John——"

"When the time comes to make a statement for the newspapers I would not alter a word."

Thus did the tongue of the flatterer evade a situation that might have been a trifle awkward for me. I rose at that.

"I must leave you now, Sir Joshua," I said, "as I have a great deal to see to and must rejoin

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Mr. Lashmar. Steps have already been taken and later on in the day I shall be able to tell you more. Meanwhile I shall see Captain Pring directly the *May Flower* arrives, and before anyone else. Our future action must depend a great deal on his statement."

This was said in my curtest official manner, and then I got out of the room as quickly as I possibly could. Lashmar was waiting, and I took him by the arm and hurried him out of the office.

"I'VE only just heard full details, Lashmar, and pretty bad they are. Now has anything been done—by us, I mean?"

"I had two of our patrol ships out at two-thirty this morning cruising over a wide area, sir. They are out still, and reporting every hour. No results, no strange air-ship seen anywhere. I've been out myself up and down the Irish coast and round the Scillies this morning, more for form's sake than anything else. And I've cabled the whole story, as far as we know it, to the States."

"Good! Any reply from them?"

"Their police ships are out from Cape Breton to the Bermudas, but they don't seem to have sighted anything out of the ordinary as yet."

"Of course it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack along that huge stretch, eight hundred miles if it's an inch. But as far as I can see it's up to them, not us."

"You think so, sir?"

"Why, yes. It's a case of sheer rank and daring piracy. It's been organized with great skill, and the pirates, whoever they are, have command of something quite out-size in the way of a ship.

"There isn't a works in England where such a boat could be built without our knowing about it before it was launched. And it's dead certain that there's nowhere in these little islands to hide her. Every single bit of spruce and piano wire with a motor-bicycle engine that can fly ten yards has to be registered and licensed by me. No, this is an American stunt."

We had been crossing the Hoe as we talked, in the direction of the Citadel, and we now came to the long, low building of Dartmoor stone, which is the Plymouth Headquarters of the A. P. It is perched on the edge of the cliff, and within five yards of the spot where Sir Francis Drake is said to have finished his game of bowls when the Armada was coming up-Channel.

We passed through the gates, where the police sentry presented arms, and began to walk up and down the terrace.

"Signal to Southampton," I ordered, "and get a couple of their fastest boats here at once. They may be useful in an emergency, and it will look as if we are doing something. Ready for action, of course, and with full service ammunition and bombs. Sir Joshua may have a fit if he likes, but there is nothing to be done until we know more—unless you can suggest anything?"

The little man shook his head. He was keen as a terrier, of course, and he had already acted with great promptitude and wisdom.

Just then an orderly came out on to the terrace and handed me a signal.

I read it out to Lashmar:

"Air-yacht *May Flower* just passed St. Mary's, doing ninety knots."

It was from our westerly A.P. station on Tresco in the Scillies. Lashmar made a rough calculation—

"Twenty-five miles west-sou'-west of Land's End; add another seventy—she'll be here just under the hour, sir."

"Then I tell you what, Mr. Lashmar, go and meet her and escort her home. Not a living soul must speak to Captain Pring before I do—not even Sir Joshua or any of the White Star people. Give that as my orders when you meet the yacht.

"But put it very politely to Mr. Van Adams—my compliments and that sort of thing. He's the sort of person who could buy the good-will of the universe for ready money. Make your escort appear a compliment from the Government."

LASHMAR never wasted words. He understood exactly, saluted and hurried to the electric railway, which ran down like a chute into the sea-drome far below. I lit a cigaret and watched, and it was a sight worth watching.

Beyond stretched the largest sea-drome in Great Britain, a harbor within a harbor, surrounded by massive concrete walls. In the roughest weather, when even within the distant breakwater the sound is turbulent, the sea-drome is calm as a duck-pond. Now it was like a sheet of polished silver, and resting on their great floats at their moorings were three gigantic air liners with electric launches and motor-boats plying between them and the landing-stages.

Right in the center was the splendid *Atlantis*, graceful as a swan, by which Connie was to leave for the States in a few hours. She was surrounded by a swarm of boats no bigger than water-beetles from where I stood.

A bell rang, there was a rumbling sound, and from a tunnel just beneath me the car with Lashmar in it shot down to the water like a stone running down a house roof. As the car dwindled to a punt, a match-box, and finally a postage stamp, I heard the creak and swish of the semaphore behind me on the roof of the station. On the far side of the sea-drome was our Patrol Ship No. 1, stream-line fuselage,

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with the familiar red, white and blue line, snow-white planes, guns fore and aft, and twin propellers of phosphor bronze winking white-hot in the afternoon sun.

The semaphore was sighted in five seconds. I got a pair of glasses and saw that the engines were already "ticking over" as Lashmar jumped into a launch and went over the pool, with a cream-white wake behind him and two ostrich-plumes of spray six feet high at the bows. He was on board in less time than it takes to write it.

I heard the faint throbbing of the four high-compression engines change to the drone of a hornet. No. 1 Patrol slid over the water until her floats lifted—lifted until they barely touched the surface, and she was clear. One clean spiral over Pinklecombe way, and then as she mounted she turned and was off over Rams Head like an arrow from a bow. Though I say it that shouldn't, my officers and men of the A.P. were just about as good as they're made!

There was a good three-quarters of an hour to spare, and the Royal Hotel was not four minutes away. After the recent excitements a cup of tea with Connie seemed just the thing.

As I legged it over the Hoe I realized that I might be very busy for some time, and in consequence late for dinner. I must tell my girl that something of great importance had happened, though in any case I was determined to see her off, come what might.

Then I remembered something. As Chief Commissioner I had absolute control over the air-ports of England in a time of crisis. In any case it would be as well to close the sea-drome in preparation for the *May Flower's* arrival. I should then be certain that no one could possibly get at Captain Pring before I could. And if I chose to detain even the Royal Mail for half an hour later on in the evening—under the circumstances!—no one would say me nay.

There is a telephone box in the hall of the Royal Hotel. In thirty seconds my orders were given, and not a living soul would enter or leave Plymouth sea-drome without my permission. Then I strolled into the Winter gardens, where I found Connie sitting at a little table among tubs of azaleas and listening to the strains of a ladies' orchestra.

"I've half an hour and ten minutes exactly, darling," I said, putting my watch on the table and helping her to early strawberries. "Tell me when the time's up, and then I must rush away for an hour before we dine."

Straightway I forgot all about the *Albatros*, Captain Pring and the mysterious armed ship in mid-Atlantic.

Knowing what I know now, I wonder how I could have taken it so lightly, even then. But grave and serious as the affair was, amazing too in its boldness, an elaborate and unexpected masterpiece of crime, it seemed remote and very far away, like something one reads of in a foreign newspaper, never conceiving that it can have anything to do with one's own personal life.

If only I could have peeped but a little way into the future!

CHAPTER III

"COLD-BLOODED PIRACY IN THE HIGH AIR"

PILOT COMMANDER PRING was a tall, lean, lantern-jawed officer, who, though of English nationality, had spent most of his life in America. His face was still pale and grim with passion and mortification as I closed the door of my private room at the A.P. Station on him, Mr. Van Adams the multimillionaire and Mr. Rickaby, second officer of the *Albatros*.

"Now, gentlemen, sit down, please," I said. "And I will ask Captain Pring a few questions. Sir Joshua Johnson has given me the main facts, but I want details. I won't detain you long, but I felt I ought to see you before any one else."

"Oh, quite!" said Mr. Van Adams, a fleshy man with a watchful eye and a jaw like a pike.

"This is an extraordinary affair, Captain Pring," I went on. "But, thank goodness, you haven't lost your ship, or any lives. I know what you feel about the *Albatros*."

"She is father, mother, brother, sister, hired girl and dog under the wagon to me!" said Pring, and then he blazed up into fury.

I disentangle the few words I can. The majority were too overdressed for respectable society.

"—His Majesty's mails! First time in history of flying, and it's happened to *me!* Cold-blooded piracy in the high air! They'd have blown us to pieces as soon as look at us! When I get hold of that slime-lapping leper, the pirate skipper, I won't leave him hide or hair to cover the wart he calls his heart!"

And so on, for a good two minutes by the office chronometer.

I let him rip. It was the quickest way. It's dangerous to throttle down a man like Pring.

"The captain is naturally furious," I said.

"Oh, quite!" answered Mr. Van Adams.

Then we got to business.

"The strange air-ship, Captain Pring. Let's begin with that. She approached you flying west, I understand?"

"She did, Sir John. Does that put you wise to anything?"

"It would appear that she was coming from Europe. But that was probably a trick. She might have been waiting about for hours."

"Curious thing, then, that all the ships in the air during the last thirty hours that were within fifteen hundred miles of the American and Canadian coast never saw anything of her.

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The air police of the U.S.A. have questioned every registered boat, transatlantic and coastal trade, and not one of them sighted her. And, as you know, Sir John, from Cape Race to Charleston in Summer weather the air's as thick with craft as gnats over a pond. Ain't that so, Mr. Van Adams, sir?"

"Quite, Captain Pring."

"I see your inference. Well, we'll leave that for a moment. I understand that there were some peculiar features about this ship. What were they?"

"She's the fastest thing in the air, bar none. That I can swear to. A pilot of my experience can't well be deceived, and if that ship—she's one of the very few I've seen with four propellers—can't do two hundred and forty miles an hour without a following wind, mind, then I'm a paretic!"

I whistled. Such speeds had been dreamed of but never known.

"Nearly three times hurricane velocity!" I said.

"She'd race the dawn, Sir John! And that's my honest belief. There's never been such a flying boat before. And she don't carry a crew of more than twelve or fifteen men, in my opinion. The rest's all engines and petrol. She ain't more than twice the size of one of your patrol ships, all over."

This was talking! Each moment the affair grew more tense and interesting.

"That narrows our field of search no end," I remarked. "A boat like that can't be built anywhere in the world without leaving traces."

"It colors the cat different, sure," said Captain Pring. "Now here's another point. Gum! I'm going to startle you some more, Sir John, but I'm speaking truth. Here's Mr. Rickaby here who'll swear to all I say."

He looked at the second officer, a good-looking, brown-faced lad.

"It's all gospel, Sir John," he broke in.

"Of course," I said impatiently, "I know you couldn't be mistaken, Pring, and I won't insult you by thinking you'd pull a Chief Commissioner's leg over an affair of this importance. What's number two? Let's have it."

"The man who runs her, or the man who built her, has solved another problem. He's produced silent engines at last. That ship motors don't make more noise than a June bug. On a dark night she could pass within two hundred yards of you and you'd never guess that she was near."

From the moment I saw the thing in its true proportions. From that moment the air became unsafe. A man-eating tiger let loose upon a quiet countryside was not a tithe as dangerous.

The three other men saw that I understood.

"THE scoundrels who came aboard the *Albatros* and looted the ship. What of them?"

"They were masked so's their mothers wouldn't have known 'em. Armed to the teeth, too. We'd have downed them quick enough even at the cost of a life or two, but there was the pirate with a four-inch gun trained on us. And she meant business. I did right, Sir John?"

The poor fellow's voice shook, and his face was corrugated with anxiety.

"I should have done exactly the same myself under the circumstances, Pring. Your first duty was to the women and children under your care. That view, I am certain, will be accepted by the company and the Government, to say nothing of the public, when it gets out.

"About these men, again: Did you judge them to be American or foreigners?"

"They didn't speak much except to give a few orders. But what they did say I heard, every word. I was with them all the time, and so was Mr. Rickaby here.

"I'll spring another surprize on you, Sir John, and then I've done. Those chaps were English, every one of them. And what's more they weren't any plug-ugly crowd neither. They were educated men of some social position, club men at some time or other, or I'm a short sport."

The second officer spoke.

"Captain Pring is perfectly right, sir," he said modestly. "I'll swear that they had been public-school or 'varsity men at some time or other."

"Where were you?" I asked quickly.

"Harrow, sir."

I nodded. Here was another astounding fact for consideration when I was alone.

"And then after a time," Pring continued, "the *Sant Iago* tramp-steamer freighter came up from 'way down south and rescued us. After that we sighted the lights of Mr. Van Adams' air-yacht, the *May Flower*, and in answer to our signal he came down and took me and Rickaby aboard."

"Quite," said the laconic millionaire.

"Tonight, Captain Pring, I shall want a long talk with you. Now I must surrender you to Sir Joshua. For the present I want you all three to give me your words of honor that you will tell no one at all anything about the appearance or speed of the ship, that her engines were silent, or you suspect the ruffians on her to be English. That is most important.

"In fact, I must make it an order, under the powers with which I am invested by the Secretary of State. As an order it can not apply to you, Mr. Van Adams, but you have been so kind and helpful hitherto that I feel sure you'll give me your promise. You must see how necessary it is."

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Mr. Van Adams was going to use his word-of-all-work—I saw it coming—when he changed his mind.

"I'm on," he said instead.

The two pilots gave me their assurances, and we walked out of the office together. As we went along the terrace Pring pointed down to the sea-drome, where the millionaire's air-yacht, a beautiful boat painted cream color and black, was now resting at her moorings.

"The *Atlantis* starts tonight," he said significantly.

"She will be escorted by an armed patrol," I said, "until she meets one of the American A.P. ships in midocean. Surely you don't think there's any danger?"

To tell the truth, I have been so concentrated upon the matter in hand that I had given hardly a thought to the outgoing liner. Can you blame me? Anyway duty came before any private considerations.

Now Pring's remark started a new set of thoughts. I looked at him with great anxiety. He did not know the whole of my reason, but he saw that I was disturbed.

"No, Sir John," he answered; "I don't think the danger worth the waggle of a mule's ear. It was only a passing remark. It stands to reason that Captain Kidd'll know that the police boats of two hemispheres are out looking for him in swarms by now. He'll figure that out sure. If he was to start any of his stunts within the next few days he'd have about as much chance as a fat man in Fiji."

"That's what I thought."

"You may make your mind easy about the *Atlantis*, sir. Besides, as you say, to put the lid on, she'll be escorted."

"Quite," I said involuntarily, and then we both laughed.

"Royal Hotel at ten-thirty," I said. "I shall be staying there tonight."

I SHALL never forget that dinner with Connie. One of her greatest charms is her serene light-heartedness. It is not silliness or frivolity—don't think that—but the bloom upon the fruit of a clear and happy nature whose conscience is at rest.

My girl wasn't a fool. She was not ignorant of evil and the gray sides of life. But they left her untouched.

Perhaps her very simplicity, the gay and stainless courage that she wore like a flag through life, had helped her to her great success. The British public might admire and enjoy the work of other artists, but they had taken little Connie Shepherd to their hearts.

She was gay at our dinner, bubbling over with joy and fun. I did my best to respond, but it was rather difficult. There was a shadow on my mind, and it would not go away.

"Dearest old John!" she said once. "What is it? You're sad, inside of you, and you're pretending you're not!"

"Darling, in an hour or two you'll be gone. How can I be very happy?"

She shook her head.

"It's not that. You can't deceive me. I don't want to part, either, especially on this day of days. But we are both of us sensible, and we both know it's only for six weeks.

"You aren't in the least sentimental—horrid word!—nor am I. We go deeper than that."

"Well then, to tell you the truth—" and it was the truth—"I am a bit under the weather, and I can't say why. Perhaps it's reaction. But most probably it's because I have been hearing some news, a matter in connection with my work, which has excited me. It's a problem of organization I must solve at once. Forgive me, sweetheart!"

"My dear, if you were not what you are, I should never have said, 'yes.' No one has ever had such a position as you at your age, and I know how you've fought for it. I love you to be preoccupied about your work."

We finished dinner, however, in a happier mood, and then walked down to the sea-drome together. Connie's heavy luggage had gone to New York by steamer a week ago. The two small trunks she had brought with her from London were already on board the *Atlantis*, and Wilson and Thumbwood carried a couple of dressing-bags.

It was a perfect evening. The sun in going to rest had hung the sky with banners, golden and glorious. The music of a band upon the pier came softly up to the terrace of the A.P. Station. Young men and maidens in Summer clothes strolled up and down over the greens, and a sickle-shaped new moon was rising over Devonport and the Hamoaze.

We went down in the electric car and boarded the *Atlantis* from one of my launches. She was lit up in all her triple decks as we climbed aboard by the saloon accommodation ladder, and a steward took Connie and her maid to her cabin, while I went to find my old friend, Captain Swainson.

The big, bearded man was sitting alone in his little room. There was a cup of black coffee by his side, and he was chewing an unlighted cigar. I saw at once that he had heard something.

"The very man!" he cried, jumping up from his basket chair and gripping me warmly by the hand. "I heard you were here, Sir John, and I made sure of seeing you before I started.

"Now what's all this? Sir Joshua's half out of his mind with worry, the offices are turned upside down, and Seth Pring—confound him!—is as close as an oyster."

I found out that he knew just what Sir Joshua knew, and no more. He was indignant but quite cool, inclined to minimize the whole affair.

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It seemed to me that to tell him the whole truth would serve no good purpose.

Pilot Superintendent Lashmar, whom I was going to send in command of the escort, would of course know everything.

"Well, I'm sending an escort with you halfway across," I said. "Lashmar will go—you know him?—in No. 1 Patrol Boat. It's heavily armed, and he can shoot straighter than any man in the service. Got his experience in the Great War."

"Escort be blowed!" said hearty Captain Swainson. "I can't think what old Pring was about to let himself be held up like that—though of course it's just as you wish, Sir John."

"I don't suppose there's the least need of it, Swainson. But this business'll make a bit of a noise, and it looks well. Now I'll tell you a secret. I'm engaged to be married. Settled it coming down in the train this morning."

"The deuce you are! A thousand congratulations!"

"Thanks. What's more, the lady is aboard your ship, and flies to New York with you tonight. I want you to look after her for me."

"Can a duck swim? Well, this *is* news! Now I understand about that escort! But do introduce me, Sir John. It will be more than a pleasure to make the young lady comfortable."

We went off to seek Connie, and found her sitting behind one of the multiplex wind-screens on the saloon deck, listening to the music of a piano and violin that came through the open hatch of the palm-court below.

I remember that the musicians were playing a selection of old English airs, sweet, plaintive music, and had just got to "The Last Rose of Summer."

I'm not emotional, but when I hear that tune today—thank goodness it isn't often!—I go out of the room.

AT A QUARTER to nine I stood on the Hoe and watched the *Atlantis* start for America. Her navigation lights were all turned on; the innumerable port-holes of the huge fuselage made an amber necklace below the immense gray planes.

Then from the towers on the sea-drome wall the "flare-path" shot out—an avenue of white and steady light to guide the liner outward. From the roof of the A.P. Station the compressed-air horn sent out three long, brazen calls. I had arranged it so. It was my God-speed to Constance. Old Swainson answered on his klaxon, and then the liner began to move slowly over the glittering water.

Every second she increased her speed and lifted until she rose clear and slanted upward. I had a vision of the mysterious silvery thing like a moth in the center of the light-beam, and then the flare-path shifted out to sea and rose till it was almost at a right angle with the water. The *Atlantis* was spiraling up to her ten-thousand-foot level, and in a moment or two she was nothing more than a speck.

Just as I lost sight of her Patrol Ship No. 1 lifted and followed like a hawk after a heron, and then both ships were lost in the night.

The band on Plymouth Pier was still playing. The young men and maidens were still strolling round the lawns in the moonlight.

The air was sweet and pure, full of laughter and the voices of girls. But I went back to the station with a heavy heart.

Two shorthand clerks and two telegraphists were waiting for me, and in the next hour I got through an infinity of work. There was a mass of telegrams to answer from America. They had been re-wired from Whitehall.

I had to send out fifty or sixty signals to organize a complete patrol of the Atlantic air-lanes. There was a long and confidential "wireless" to my assistant Muir Lockhart in London, and last though by no means least a condensed report of everything for the Home Secretary.

It was after ten when I had finished, and I walked slowly back to the "Royal," dead tired in mind and body. When I came to think of it I realized that this had been one of the most eventful and exciting days of my life.

Thumbwood—you will hear a great deal about him before this narrative is over—was waiting in the hall. He hurried me up-stairs to where a tepid bath dashed with ammonia was waiting. Five minutes in this, a brisk rub-down, a complete change into evening kit, a teacup of Bovril with a tablespoon of brandy and a pinch of celery salt in it—what Thumbwood called my "bran-mash"—and I was a new man again.

For a perfect valet commend me a man who has had charge of racehorses in his time!

Then I went down to meet Captain Pring. I saw at once, as I came into the public rooms of the hotel, that the news was out. Groups of people were standing together and talking earnestly. There was a buzz of suppressed excitement, natural anywhere but particularly so in the principal air-port of England.

And there were special editions of the evening papers.

These—I got one and looked—had made the most of very scanty material. Nothing like the whole truth had leaked out, but there was nevertheless a sensation of the first magnitude. I was recognized and pointed to; a naval captain even spoke, and tried to pump me—though he soon found that there was nothing doing—and when Captain Pring came into the lounge some idiot started to cheer, and there was what the papers describe as a "scene."

Pring and I supped alone in a private room and had a long confidential talk, in the course of which I learned many things. I am not going

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to give any details of that talk at present. It was momentous—it is enough to say that now—and has its proper place further on in the story.

The worthy captain went at twelve, and I retired to bed. Thumbwood slept in a dressing-room opening out of my bedroom. By his couch was a telephone, which I arranged was to be connected with the A.P. Station all night long. If any signal came Thumbwood was to take it, and if important wake me at once.

I am going to conclude this first portion of the narrative in a few lines as possible. Even today I shirk the writing of them.

I was awakened suddenly to find my room blazing with light; I afterward found that the exact time was 2.30 A.M.

Thumbwood was standing by the bed.

"Sir John," he said hoarsely, "there's a signal!"

One glance at the lad's face was enough, and I set my teeth—hard.

"Bad news?"

"Terrible news, Sir John!"

"Go on."

"*Atlantis* attacked two hundred miles west of Cork. Captain Swainson and four other men shot dead. Patrol Boat No. 1 disabled. Commander Lashmar and most of the crew killed. Signal got through by two survivors of crew, who managed to repair wireless."

Twice I swallowed with a dry mouth. Thumbwood knew what I wanted to ask.

"The young lady, Sir John, and her maid——"

"Dead, too?"

"No, Sir John. They were taken from among all the other passengers and put aboard the pirate ship, which then flew away with them."

CHAPTER IV

THE NEWSPAPERS IN FULL CRY

YOU are to imagine, if you please, the private room of the Chief Commissioner of Air Police at Whitehall.

A soft Turkey carpet of dull brick-reds and blues covers the parquet floor. The walls are hung with pictures of famous airmen of the past, inventions, fighters, pioneers of the great commercial service of air liners which now fills the skies and has shrunk the planet—for all practical purposes—to a fifth of its former size.

There are two or three huge writing-tables covered with crimson morocco; the chairs are thickly padded and luxurious. A range of tall windows looks down upon the endless stir and movement of the wide street, where the nerves of Empire meet in one central ganglion.

Standing by one of these windows is a light-haired young man of thirty in a lounge suit of dark blue. He wears a rather heavy, carefully trimmed mustache, and his face is seamed and furrowed with anxiety and gray from want of rest.

Thus you see me in London, two days after Thumbwood brought the terrible news to my bedroom in the hotel at Plymouth.

General Sir Hercules Nichelson, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Flying Corps, had been with me for half an hour, and was just taking his leave.

"Then all that is satisfactorily arranged, Sir John," he said. "We shall supplement your patrol ships with three war-ships at Plymouth and three at the Scillies. They will of course be air cruisers, both faster and better armed than your boats, and between us both we shall put an end to this pest before many days are over."

"I sincerely trust so," I said. "And I do not see how it is possible that there should be any further outrages. The net will be too close. America, with its much greater coastal area, is taking extraordinary precautions."

"It will be impossible for these devilish scoundrels to escape," the general repeated with confidence—the onus of it all was not falling upon *him!*—"and now we quite understand one another."

"Perfectly, I think, Sir Hercules."

"Your chief station officer is to be in full command, under you, at each air-port."

"It was your suggestion, Sir Hercules, and since it came from you I do think it would be best. My men are always patrolling the air-lanes. The organization is complete already."

"Exactly. And as for my fellows they will be proud to serve under such gallant and experienced officers as those of the A.P.

"It's kind of you to say so."

"Not at all. It is the truth. And now as an older man let me give you a little advice if I am not taking a liberty. Don't let this affect you too much, Sir John. Every sane man knows that neither you nor any one else could have avoided what has happened, or have provided against it.

"It is a great thing to have an acute sense of responsibility; I honor you for it. But don't overdo it. I know the strain you are enduring. Don't let it go too far. If you were to break down now, that would be a final disaster."

The kind, white-haired old man shook me warmly by the hand and left the room.

Almost immediately young Bickenhall, my private secretary, came in.

"Here is the morning's press, sir," he said, and upon my table he put down various columns cut from the journals of that morning—all dealing with the sensational and terrible events on the Atlantic that were now the common knowledge of the world.

I sat down to glance through them—I was keeping an iron grip upon myself these times—in order to gage public opinion. It occurs to me that in order to acquaint you with the progress of events from my awakening at Plymouth till the morning of which I speak I can

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not do better than quote a paragraph here and there from the daily papers. It will bring us up to date more quickly and concisely than in any other way.

This then from one of the leading London journals, a weighty, somewhat ponderous sheet with considerable influence:

WE HAVE given an account of the first attack upon the air liner *Albatros*, under command of Captain Pring, whose conduct in such a trying situation did not deviate from the best traditions of our British aviators. Most people would have thought that after such a dastardly outrage the unknown pirate would have been content to rest upon his infamous laurels and retire to his lair with the valuable booty he had secured. But it was not so.

With an audacity unparalleled in the annals of crime this vulture on the very next night commits an outrage which for ferocity and daring makes the first one seem like a mere frolic.

It is now possible to disentangle something of the truth from the various conflicting stories that have reached us, and it is moreover confirmed in its essential details by the authorities of the Air Police at Whitehall, who have issued a guarded statement.

It appears that two nights ago the famous air liner *Atlantis* left the Plymouth sea-drome at about nine in the evening. The captain, Pilot Commander Swainson, was one of the best known and trusted officers in the transatlantic service. He did not anticipate the slightest danger.

Sir John Custance, Chief Commissioner of the Air Police of Great Britain, was himself at Plymouth having hurried down from London upon receiving news of the first piracy. Sir John insisted that the *Atlantis* should be escorted for half of her journey to America by the armed Patrol Ship No. 1, under command of Superintendent Pilot Commander Lashmar, D.S.O., himself an officer of great distinction.

Half-way across the Atlantic the liner was to be met by a similar escort of the United States A.P., and let us here say that it is difficult to tell what other precautions Sir John Custance could have devised.

The *Atlantis* carried the royal mail and a full complement of passengers, among whom were some distinguished names. Mr. Bootfeller, of the United States Senate, Mr. Greenwell, the well-known publisher, the Duke of Perth, and 'Walty Priest,' the cinema star, were among the men, while in the list of ladies was Miss Constance Shepherd, a young actress, of whom it is not too much to say that she has endeared herself to the British public.

About two o'clock in the morning disastrous and terrible news began to filter through to the Plymouth wireless stations. It can be summarized as follows:

When not more than two hundred and fifty miles west of Ireland the patrol ship, which was flying three miles or so behind the *Atlantis*, was suddenly attacked by an unknown air-ship. The moon had set, the ten-thousand-feet level was dark, and that attack was delivered without the slightest warning. Patrol Ship No. 1 was instantly disabled by a rain of shells. Captain Lashmar was shot dead, and with him perished all of the crew except three men, one of whom was so seriously wounded that his life is despaired of, the other two being only slightly wounded.

An utter wreck, the patrol ship was just able to descend to the water, where she rested like a wounded and dying bird.

Meanwhile the unknown ship caught up with the *Atlantis* and commenced—as in the case of the *Albatros*—with shooting away her wireless aerials. The rudder and stern propeller were then destroyed, and the great liner forced to plane to the surface of the water. Six masked and armed ruffians went aboard her, and a systematic looting of the ship commenced.

Captain Swainson could not bear this. He drew a revolver and shot one of the pirates dead. Then, calling on his crew to assist him, he made a determined rush, regardless of consequences. The fight was unequal. Captain Swainson was the only defender who carried firearms, while the robbers were provided with heavy automatic pistols.

Five men of the *Atlantis* were killed almost instantly, and the rest cowed, while the systematic robbery continued. And now, alas! 'horrors upon horror's head accumulate.' Their evil work completed, the ruffians sought out Miss Constance Shepherd and her maid, Miss Wilson, from among the passengers.

These unfortunate ladies were forced at the pistol's mouth to embark upon the pirate's small boat, in which they were rowed rapidly to the pirate ship and taken on board. The ship then rose from the water and was lost to sight.

Meanwhile two heroes were at work. On board the broken patrol ship two able navigators, Paget and Fowles, were wounded indeed, but not entirely disabled. Both men had some knowledge of wireless, and with superhuman toil, as the hours went on, they contrived to rig up a temporary apparatus which at last served to send out a brief account of the disaster and a call for help.

When rescue ships arrived at early dawn they found that the patrol ship had drifted close to the *Atlantis* and that Dr. Weatherall, the surgeon of the liner, had swum aboard the No. 1 and rendered what help he could to the wounded men.

Press representatives are at Plymouth, but so far few of the passengers of the *Atlantis* have been able, and none have been allowed by the authorities, to make personal statements for publication. This embargo, we are assured, will be removed by this evening.

This is a precise account of what had happened.

We must now turn to the consideration of the situation. . . .

ANOTHER journal, a weekly one this time, headed its remarks with a portrait of my unhappy self. Underneath was written: "The Man the Atlantic Pirates Tricked!" The rag had an immense circulation in all the tap-rooms of England.

Well, I would see what the blackguards of the country were reading about me. Shrewd young Bickenhall wouldn't have brought the unclean thing in if he hadn't thought it worth while. I give it for what it's worth.

Poor Johnny Custance! You're up against it good and thick today, and no mistake, and Paul Pry (this was the signature of the tout who wrote the article) can't say he's very sorry for you. For some time past a little bird has been whispering in the clubs that all is not well in the state of Denmark—to wit,

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the office of the Commissioner of Air Police at Whitehall.

The aristocratic young gentlemen who daily condescend to drop into this palatial edifice for an hour or two have long held the reputation of being the best dressed of all our minor government officials, and considering the salaries they draw from the public purse this is not surprizing. But I have never yet heard that they did any work worth mentioning, or indeed anything to justify their precious and beautiful existence.

Flying Police we must have, and never has the necessity for them been greater than at this moment; but there is a vast deal of difference from the handy pilot of a patrol ship at Plymouth or Portland and the bureaucratic popinjays of Pall Mall.

Sir John Custance, Bart., is the typical government official of the musical comedy or the comic paper. He is an aristocrat who after a short experience in the air is shoved into the highly paid and responsible position he holds without any reason that the man in the street can understand. A baronet, and if report speaks truly a man of considerable private means, I have— in common with many other people—often asked myself what possible qualification this young gentleman can have for his job.

Johnny is a most estimable person, no doubt, in private life. I have heard it remarked that his mustache is one of the most perfect things in the West End of London, and he is frequently to be seen adorning a stall or box at the Parthenon Theater. But few people have ever taken him seriously as the head of our Air Police, and now nobody will.

There was a row of stars here, as if Mr. Paul Pry paused for breath or was stopping to pick up another handful of mud, and then he went on again:

If the nation is called upon to pay thousands and thousands a year for the upkeep of an efficient service of air police it is entitled to see that it gets it, and that the man in charge is able to provide it. What has happened? A crew of murdering ruffians in an air-ship have looted two of our greatest air liners, slaughtered several people, kidnapped one of our most popular actresses and escaped scot-free. Vanished into the wide! While Sir John Custance twiddles his thumbs in Whitehall and calls upon the air forces of the Admiralty and War Office to supplement his own miserably inefficient organization.

As usual, we are not without some very special and exclusive information in this office. My readers know from past experience that their Paul is not easily caught napping. I believe that I shall have something to say that will startle every one in next week's number, though for certain reasons I can not be more explicit at present.

Before concluding these remarks, however, I must say a word or two about the extraordinary and sinister disappearance of delightful Constance Shepherd. Sad as it is to hear of brave men shot down while doing their duty, there is something peculiarly terrible in the carrying off of the little lady to whom London owes so much.

Dear little Connie! We of Bohemia knew and loved you well! Many is the happy hour that Paul Pry has spent in your company, many the bumper of bubbly water he has quaffed to your success!

No one could possibly have foreseen such a tragic ending to the American journey which Miss Shepherd set out upon with such high hopes. And yet there was not wanting a slight shadow of premonition. Only a week ago she said to me:

"Paul, I'm not so sure, after all, that everything will go well. There are certain things. I can't tell you of them——"

But I must refrain from betraying a confidence. Let it be enough to say that my little friend had her moments of dejection when she was not entirely happy about the future.

I PUT down the paper and rang for Bickenhall.

"You've read this, I suppose?" I asked, pointing to it.

He nodded.

"Lies, of course," he said; "mere words to fill up the column."

"No doubt. Still, the man hints all sorts of things, —— him! And one can't neglect any possible clue."

I was in a raging fury, and Bickenhall saw it though he was far from suspecting the true cause.

"The office is in the Strand," he said, "three minutes by taxi. I'll go and interview this Paul Pry and put the fear of God into him."

I knew my Bickenhall. He is an energetic and hefty young man, and though I had little hopes that he would discover anything of value I had a shrewd suspicion that Mr. Paul Pry was about to experience a peculiarly unpleasant ten minutes.

I was right in both my conjectures.

The secretary returned in half an hour.

"Just a ramp," he said. "I found a greasy ruffian smelling of gin in a back room, and frightened him out of his life. He's never met Miss Shepherd and has no private information whatever. Will apologize in any manner you like."

I am not going to bother you with what the journalists wrote. There were hundreds of columns of suggestions, conjecture, reproof, alarm, and so forth. On the whole my department was let down fairly lightly, and I was glad.

Please don't think that I cared twopence for myself. I did not. But I should have bitterly resented any serious reflections on my staff, officers and men, who were, and are, as able and loyal a body as can be found anywhere in the world.

CHAPTER V

THE FAMILIAR SPIRIT OF MR. VAN ADAMS

AT MIDDAY I had an appointment with the Home Secretary. He received me with the utmost kindness, and we had half an hour of highly confidential talk. The purport of it will appear later. This is not the place for it.

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Toward the end I informed him that I had a request to make.

"Tell me," he answered at once, "and let me repeat that the Government has every confidence in you, Sir John. Don't take this too hardly, I beg of you."

I had a sudden impulse.

"I trust," I said, "that my anxiety for the public welfare is in no degree overshadowed by a private sorrow. Indeed, I am sure that it isn't. But, if I may speak in confidence, I should like you to know, that I was engaged to be married to Miss Constance Shepherd."

There was a perceptible silence. I heard the great man take a long inward breath and murmur to himself—

"Poor fellow!"

Then he did the right, the quite perfect thing; he stretched out his hand and took mine in a firm, warm grasp.

When I could speak I returned to business.

"My request, sir, is this. I want to disappear for a month."

"Disappear, Sir John?"

"That's what it amounts to. Practically, I am going to ask for four weeks' leave of absence. It must be private though. If the news were published the public would misunderstand and think I was deserting my post in a time of difficulty and danger."

"Whereas?"

"Whereas I want to investigate this affair in my own way. I believe that the theories of the press and public, and also those of Scotland Yard—with whom I have been in consultation—are quite wrong. Nor do my communications with America give me any reason to change my opinion.

"This is a matter of life and death to me. I owe the Government, who have promoted me so rapidly to the high position I occupy, a solution of this mystery. I owe them and the public that the fiends who have committed these outrages should be brought to justice. And if God allows me I will do it.

"My honor and that of my department are at stake. Those two things come before anything else. In addition I have the private reasons of which I have told you. And in order to succeed I am persuaded that my way is the only way.

"You have certainly the strongest motives a man well could have to urge you on. But can you be a little more explicit?"

"I want to leave Mr. Muir Lockhart in charge at the office. He is perfectly capable of taking charge. He has everything at his fingers' ends. And I shall arrange that he can always communicate with me at any time."

The Home Secretary thought for a moment, and drummed with his fingers on the arm of his chair. He had been a famous barrister, and was renowed for the perfection of his turnout. His finger-nails were pink and polished as the light fell upon them, and I wondered if he had them manicured.

Then he looked up.

"Very well, do as you like," he said suddenly. "I take it that you know what you're about. And heartfelt good wishes for your success."

THIS is how I plunged into a series of dangerous adventures, a dark underworld of crime and almost superhuman cunning, probably without parallel in modern times.

Arrangements were soon made at Whitehall. Muir Lockhart was an understanding man, and by three o'clock in the afternoon I walked out into the sunshine free from all official cares for a month. I took a long, deep breath as I crossed the Horse Guards Parade and made my way to the long, green vista of the Mall.

"The first act is over," I thought. "The curtain is rising on the real drama. Somewhere in this world there is a man whose discovery and death I owe to society and to myself."

I have given you but little indication of my mental state during the last few days. It won't bear much writing about even now. A cold fury, instead of blood, came and went in my veins, and my heart was ice.

Every now and again, especially when I was alone, agony for which there is, there can be, no name got hold of me and sported with me as the wind sports with a leaf. I suppose I had a tiny foretaste of what is felt by a soul that is eternally damned.

I dared not think too much of Constance and her fate. If I had let myself go that way the running waters would have risen and overwhelmed me utterly.

But, thank God, my intellect held. The streak of hardness which had served me so well in my career and had enabled me to push to the top at an early age came to the rescue now. Every faculty was sharpened; the will concentrated to a single purpose.

I was alone, and I walked in the darkness, but I was conscious of power—charged to the brim as a battery is charged with the electric fluid. As I walked calmly up St. James' on the way to my chambers I doubt if a more single-minded and dangerous man than I walked the streets of London.

And I knew by some mysterious intuition that I should succeed in the task before me. I had not as yet more than the most rudimentary idea how I was going to set about it, but I should succeed.

Don't misunderstand me. I had hardly any hope of seeing my dear love alive again. I believe that all the joy of life was finally extinguished.

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But justice—call it vengeance rather—remained, and I was as sure that I was the chosen instrument of that as I was that I had just passed Marlborough House and the Palace of St. James.

My expensive but delightful chambers in Half Moon Street were on the second floor—sitting-room, dining-room, bed and dressing rooms and bath.

The sitting-room was paneled in cedarwood which had been stained a delicate olive-green, with the moldings of the panels picked out in dull gold. Connie and her gay young friends, when they came to have tea with me or supper after the theater, used to say that it was one of the most charming rooms in London.

I had spent an infinity of time and money on it, determined that it should be "just so." For instance, the carpet was from Kairowan in Tunisia, and had taken a whole family of Arab weavers five years to make. Never was there a more perfect blue—not the crude peacock color of the cheaper Oriental rugs, but a blue infused with a silver-ash shade, contrasting marvelously with the warm brick-reds and tawny yellows. It was a bargain at four hundred pounds.

I had hung only half a dozen pictures in this room, all modern and all good. My "Boys Bathing," by Charles Conder—better known as the painter of marvelous fans—was a masterpiece of sunlight and sea-foam which made me the envy of half the collectors in town.

Then I had a William Nicholson—"Chelsea Ware"—that was extraordinarily fascinating. It was just some old Chelsea plates and a jug standing on a table. It doesn't sound fascinating, I know, but the painting was so brilliant, there was such vision in the way it was seen, that one could look at it for hours.

There was an open hearth of rough red brick in the room, deep and square, and when there was a fire it burned in a gipsy brazier of iron. I had a lot of trouble to get this last of the right shape, and finally it had to be made for me from the design of an artist in Birmingham.

Such a room with its perfect color harmonies and severe lines required no knickknacks. Nothing small or petty, however beautiful in itself, could be allowed there. I had two cabinets of magnificent china in my dining-room, but china would have been quite out of place here.

Along one wall, about four feet from the floor, was a single shelf of old pewter—cups and flagons of the Tudor period with the double-rose hallmark—and that was all.

As I entered and flung myself wearily into a chair the afternoon sunlight poured in through the half-drawn curtains of sea-green silk. In the ceiling a hidden electric fan was whirring, and the room was deliciously cool.

And as I looked round the place seemed hateful beyond all expression. I was sick of it, loathed its beauty and comfort; an insane desire came to take a hammer and wreak havoc there as my eyes fell on the only photograph in the room. It was one of Constance, in a frame of dull silver studded with turquoises, and she had given it to me no longer than a fortnight ago.

THUMBWOOD slept at the top of the house. He came in after I had been resting for a few minutes.

"I've made the necessary arrangements, Charles," I said, "and we shall start operations at once."

I had no secrets from this devoted friend and servant.

"Glad to hear it, Sir John. I've been round the town this morning, and there's a lot of talk."

He followed me into the sitting-room and brought me cigars.

"You see," he went on confidentially, "a gentleman's servant, especially if he belongs to the club just off Jermyn Street, and more specially still if he's been a racing man, hears all that's going on quicker than any one.

"This morning I've been talking to the porters and valets of two of the best clubs, Sir John. Then I 'ad a crack with Meggit, the bookmaker, what does all the St. James' smaller commissions, and after that I strolled to the Parthenon Theater, and took out the stage door-keeper and filled him up and made 'im talk a bit. 'Im and me is great friends consequent of my taking so many messages and flowers for you, sir, when Miss Shepherd was acting there."

"Ah! I see you haven't wasted your time."

I smiled inwardly at Thumbwood's idea of helping me.

"No, Sir John. I've learned a lot of funny little things, just trifles, so to say; but they may prove useful later on. There's one thing you ought to know at once. Them theatricals have been talking, and it's all over town that Miss Shepherd traveled down to Plymouth with you. It's certain to be in the papers this afternoon, if it ain't already. There's been half a dozen reporters buzzing round the theater this morning."

I ground my teeth with anger, but only for a moment. Of course the thing was inevitable. There was only one thing to do.

I took up the telephone on the writing-table and got put on to the *Evening Wire*.

"I am Sir John Custance," I said to the editor. "I hear that there is a good deal of talk going about London in respect of Miss Constance Shepherd and myself.

"To avoid the least misconception I authorize you to state in your next edition that Miss Shepherd and I were engaged to be married. I'll send my servant down to your office at once with a note confirming this conversation."

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It was the only way, much as I hated it, to stop malicious gossip, and I scribbled a *chit* to the editor.

"Get into a taxi and take that at once," I said to Thumbwood.

As I gave him the letter there was a ring at the front-door bell.

The little man went out and I heard voices, one harsh and deep, that seemed familiar.

"Who is it?" I asked as Charles returned. "I can't see any one."

"Wouldn't take any denial, sir. It's the American gentleman who picked up Captain Pring after the attack on the *Albatros*. Says he must see you."

"Mr. Van Adams?"

"Yes, Sir John."

"Show him in."

A moment afterward I was shaking hands with the thick-set man whose jaw was like a pike's and whose eyes resembled animated steel. Thumbwood went off with the letter. I heard the front door close after him.

NOW I don't suppose at that moment I would have seen any other man in London unconnected with my office at Whitehall. I didn't want to see the millionaire, but directly he was inside the room my irritation vanished. He had meant to see me. He had now accomplished his end, and I had a firm conviction that sentries with fixed bayonets wouldn't have kept him out.

He sat down quietly in the chair I indicated and took a cigar with great deliberation. I was not in the least impatient. I knew now that I was glad that he had come, and waited for him to begin.

When he did speak the harsh voice was considerably modified, and no one whatever could have said he was an American.

"Any success I may have made in life," he said without preliminary, "has come from the faculty of judging men. I started as a youth with this power in a more than ordinary degree. I've been developing it ever since."

He puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. He had said this with calm determination, not in the least as if he were speaking of himself, but merely as a man stating a fact which would be useful a little later on.

For my part I said nothing. I felt as if I were playing a sort of decorous game with rigid rules. to speak then would be to revoke.

"And though the ordinary man does not like to hear such a statement I have a pretty good idea of you, Sir John. You're not an ordinary man. That's why I'm here. I'll put it in two words. I want to help you. I *can* help you. It is for you to say if you want me."

Now there could only be one answer to a question like that. The man in my armchair was one of the most powerful men on earth. Moreover his reputation stood high. He was no financial pirate. The whole world trusted him.

"I answer that, Mr. Van Adams, with two words: Thank you."

He nodded as if pleased.

"Quite!" he said; and then, half-turning in his chair, "Of course I don't ask you to tell me any official secrets."

"There are none for one thing," I told him. "You know exactly as much as my department knows, as I told the Home Secretary this morning. There are no developments, except of course the protective measures we and the States are taking.

"The one thing I can tell you, and which is in strict confidence, is that I have arranged for my official duties to be carried on by my assistant for a month. From this afternoon I am absolutely free to do what I like and go where I like. No one will know of this but my confidential servant. I intend to devote this evening to mapping out a plan of campaign."

"That's good, Sir John. That is just what I wanted to hear. Let me explain my motives. They are not complicated. One is that as one of the chief money-brokers of the world I naturally want to prevent any financial panic. Next, I am a bit of a sportsman in my way. I like hunting things down. This pursuit appeals to me a good deal.

"And last—when I was thirty-five a desperate gang of crooks in San Francisco kidnaped my little daughter Pearl—she that is Duchess of Shropshire now—and held her to ransom. It was before you took notice, for I'm close on seventy, but the episode created some considerable stir at the time. I can pretty well guess what you are going through now."

As he looked at me his eyes were no longer like living steel, nor his jaw like a pike's.

So he also knew! I mumbled something or other.

"Quite," he answered quickly, and then went on:

"In thinking over various ways in which I could be of use I have come to a certain conclusion. Money, I suppose, won't help you—though of course any sum is available.

"I have the Government behind me, and I myself am not poor, thank you."

"It is as I thought. In England I myself can do nothing personally that others can not do as well. In America I have every sort of influence."

I looked him in the face.

"I am not going to trouble about America in the very least."

"Quite! I see what you mean. And I am absolutely of your opinion. Now I'll come to what I can do for you."

"What is it?" I asked eagerly.

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HE ROSE slowly from his chair and came up to me. When he spoke he had dropped his voice a full tone.

"I must let you into one or two little secrets about myself," he said. "In the first place, a man so rich as I am does not become so without making powerful and unscrupulous enemies. Also, American methods are direct.

"It will probably surprize you to hear that my life has been attempted twelve or fifteen times, but that is the case. Some of the methods were diabolically ingenious too! However, I stand here today, quite unharmed and quite safe. Why? I'll tell you.

"Quite early in my successful career I saw what would happen. I watched other men assassinated and was determined that it shouldn't happen to me.

"How was it to be avoided? I thought that point out very carefully, and came to a conclusion. I must find and then attach to my person some one of extraordinary intelligence, cunning, skill and personal prowess.

"My ambitions ran high. I wanted some one who would devote his whole life to my service, a familiar spirit, no less!

"It took me three years of steady work to find that familiar spirit—to discover the exact combination of qualities I required. But a multimillionaire is the magician of today, and I have a genie as clever and infallible as any out of the old 'Arabian Nights.'

"I pay him the salary of a cinema star, and I say, meaning every word of it, that there isn't another like him in the world. Do you think this tall talk, Sir John?"

It was certainly amazing, but I could not but believe him.

"You startle and you interest me deeply," I replied. "You are to be congratulated."

"I am—on a unique human possession. Well, you can't have failed to see what I'm driving at. I will lend you this man, place his services entirely at your disposal, for a month!"

For a moment or two I was silent. I believed every word that Van Adams said, and I was not hesitating—only just letting the offer, and what it meant, sink into my mind. It became plain. It was like the offer of a rope-ladder to a man in prison, a light and a pickax to an entombed miner.

"It is the most generous offer I've ever heard of, Mr. Van Adams. I can't express my thanks. You really mean this?"

"I do. And as an ounce of proof is worth a ton of talk—allow me to introduce you to Mr. Danjuro!"

He turned round as he spoke and I with him. Then I gave a cry of astonishment which I could not have kept back to save my life.

Standing some yard or so away was a little Japanese gentleman, not much more than five feet high. He wore a gold pince-nez, neat blue lounge suit and brown boots. There was nothing noticeable about him in any way, except an unusually fine cranial development—a massive forehead and a great space between the corners of the dark eyes and the ears.

"Good Heavens! How did he get here?" I said.

Van Adams laughed.

"I daresay he'll tell you; I don't know," he answered. "I just told him to be here. I wanted to give you an object lesson, in fact.

"Now, Mr. Danjuro knows all that I know. You can trust him absolutely. He knows what is in front of him, and he knows where to find me when I'm wanted. Now I'll leave you together and say good afternoon."

He was gone almost before I could thank him.

CHAPTER VI

MR. DANJURO, THINKING-MACHINE, EXPLAINS HIMSELF

"WON'T you sit down?" I said foolishly.

The little Japanese bowed politely and did so.

I was at a loss what to say. My mind was in a whirl. I wanted to laugh, to call Van Adams back, but my dominating sensation was one of supreme annoyance.

So this natty, commonplace little Asiatic was the millionaire's "familiar spirit"! He was unique, was he!

I cursed myself for several kinds of fool to have saddled myself with this amazing stranger at the beginning of my work. At any rate, I reflected irritably, as I sat down opposite, I could easily send him off on some wild-goose chase or another.

Yes! I was never more annoyed in my life, and my annoyance lasted for exactly sixty seconds. Without the slightest embarrassment of any sort and with no preliminaries at all Mr. Danjuro plunged into business.

His voice was clear and low. He had no accent of any kind, though his English was a trifle pedantic and scholarly. He spoke as impersonally as a gramophone.

"I am entirely with you, Sir John, in your opinion that it is not in the United States of America, but here—in England—that we shall solve the mystery surrounding this dark business."

"But I never said——"

He smiled faintly, almost wearily.

"And since I have the great honor to be associated with you I trust you will allow me to suggest a plan of campaign.

"I was going to try and think one out tonight."

"It is a privilege to assist. I have come in contact with many crafty and malignant criminals during the last thirty years, but here one

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detects a master. It will be a pleasure indeed to hunt him down. Have I your honorable permission to smoke?"

With one hand he produced a square of rice paper and a pinch of tobacco from his pocket, and rolled a cigaret on his knee like a conjuring trick. He had not raised his voice, but a sudden gleam came into the oblique black eyes which suggested the deep but hidden ferocity of his race.

He resumed—

"From all I have gathered, and I have talked much with Captain Pring, Mr. Rickaby and the passengers of the *Albatros*, we have to look for a man who is (1) an aviator in the first rank; (2) an inventor and mechanical genius, or able to command the services of such; (3) a person of some wealth or able to procure money."

I followed him completely and said so. From what we already knew these deductions were perfectly fair.

"I thank you. Now we come to the man himself. I believe him to be a person of education, and one who has held a good social position. He is also desperate in his circumstances, and a person to whom material pleasure is the highest good."

"Rickaby said that the men who came aboard the *Albatros* spoke like educated people."

"Yes. Our field of search already begins to grow narrower. Am I right in saying that every aviator in this country must pass an examination and be licensed before he is allowed to fly?"

"It is so. All aviators, professional or amateur, must have a license from the Air Police. This is registered. I have already had the records for the past ten years searched at Whitehall. But this has yielded no result. There is no one who could possibly be our man."

"It was well thought of, Sir John, if I may say so. But in my opinion we shall have to go back a good deal further than ten years.

"We now come to the question of the pirate air-ship itself and its peculiar qualities. Let us fix upon one—the silence of its engines. I am aware that the constructors of motor engines have been busy upon this problem for years."

"And with little result. The problem has not been solved."

"Except by our unknown friends. I have already examined all the recent patents of silencing-devices at your patent office here. I spent yesterday morning there, and found nothing.

"The significance of that is obvious. Any ordinary inventor who had discovered somethin of such importance would protect it at once.

"We can therefore make up our minds that in no regular motor-engineering works throughout this coutry has the complete silencer been evolved. It would be impossible for the most brilliant inventor to keep such a thing entirely to himself."

"Again the field shrinks?"

"Yes, Sir John. We now have a man of the character already indicated, who, as he has undoubtedly constructed silent engines, must have done so in secret. He must have had private engineering-works in order to make an important part of his machines.

"The point is, where? On the Continent? I think not. He would be watched far more carefully than in this country. America is still more unlikely.

"Let us assume England. Having done so, we can, I think, safely deduce that for obvious reasons this man and his confederates—for we know he has them—would endeavor to build his pirate ship as near as possible to the place he intended to use as the base of his operations. And that base—if your experience bears me out—is certainly somewhere or other on the coast?"

"Of course one would say that it must be so, Mr. Danjuro. And yet it seems impossible. The whole coast of England is patrolled by the coast-guards. For all practical purposes England is no bigger than a pocket-handkerchief.

"I thought of Scotland and the Northern Isles. I thought of wild places on the Irish coast. I have had a fleet of air-ships surveying and photographing these places for the last two days. No hangar bigger than a motor-shed could have escaped their notice.

"All the land police of the villages round the coasts have been interrogated by Scotland Yard. Nothing, nothing whatever has been seen."

I spoke with some passion, for I felt it. The sense of impotence was maddening.

THE Japanese rolled another cigaret. As he did so the door opened and Thumbwood came in.

"I delivered your note, Sir John, and the editor's compliments and thanks."

"Charles," I said, "this gentleman here is Mr. Danjuro. He is going to help us. Mr. Danjuro is"—I hesitated for a moment; really it was difficult to describe him!—"is one of the foremost detectives in the world."

Thumbwood's hand went up to his forehead in the stable-boy's salute. Then as he saw my guest full-face he started.

"I saw you this morning, sir," he said. "You were talking to old Mrs. Jessop, the dresser at the Parthenon Theater. It was in the 'Blue Dragon,' just round the corner by the stage-door."

"And you were with the stage-door keeper. A curious coincidence," Mr. Danjuro replied with his weary smile, and at a look from me Thumbwood, very puzzled indeed, left the room.

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"I spent part of this morning at the Parthenon Theater, Sir John. Your servant apparently thought of doing the same thing. A man of considerable acumen? I imagined so.

"To proceed. Now that we have cleared away a few preliminary obstructions, we arrive at a point which I regard as of great significance. You are engaged—I speak of intimate matters, but purely in my character of a consultant—to Miss Constance Shepherd, a young lady of beauty and celebrity."

Confound the fellow, he spoke of Connie as if she were a fish!

"That is so," I told him.

"That young lady was kidnaped by the unknown airman. From among all the passengers she and her maid were singled out. Now that fact—upon which you must have already pondered considerably—is a key fact.

"Was it done for the purpose of holding this lady up to ransom? I see the suggestion has been made in the press. I answer no. In the first place, it would be altogether too dangerous a game, and the attempt would certainly lead to discovery. Secondly, there were other people on board who would have been more profitable prey. The Duke of Perth, for instance, or the cinema actor who received sixty thousand pounds a year.

"Now it is extremely improbable that in the rush and excitement of the attack and robbery of the *Atlantis* the pirate leader was suddenly struck by a pretty face. Indeed we know from accounts of the passengers that Miss Shepherd was deliberately searched for.

"That indicates with certainty that the pirate knew she was on board, and had a design of capturing her. In its turn this predicates a former acquaintance and undoubtedly a repulse in the past. Hence my inquiries and my interview with the theater dresser this morning."

I astonished that little man. It was the first and last time. Leaping up in my chair, I believe I shouted like a madman. At any rate Thumbwood was inside the room before I could find words to speak.

Something had flashed upon me, white-hot and sudden, as an electric advertisement flashes out upon one at night. It was something that I had entirely and utterly forgotten until now.

"There was a man," I gasped, "a scoundrel who had been annoying Miss Shepherd for a long time. He wanted to marry her. She told me of it. And he was once a celebrated flying man!"

"Long ago, in the Great War," said Danjuro calmly. "Major Helzephron, V.C. I was aware of it."

"And one of the boys if ever there was one, sir!" Thumbwood broke in. "Warned off the course everywhere. I've got a bit of information, too!"

I stared at them, trembling with excitement. And then reality, like a cold douche of water, brought me to my senses.

Of course it was impossible. The thing was a mere coincidence. Why, while the first ship—the *Albatros*—had been attacked, this man Helzephron was in London! He had traveled west in the same train with me and Connie.

"May I ask exactly what you know, Sir John?"

I told Danjuro precisely what had happened at Paddington and how Connie herself had explained it.

He listened to me in attentive silence. When I had finished I saw that a small leather pocketbook had appeared in his hands—everything that the fellow did had the uncanny effect of a clever trick—and he was turning over the leaves.

"So far," he began, "in the consideration of this problem we have been eliminating impossibilities, or improbabilities so strong that they amount to that. This has left us with a small residuum of fact, unproved fact, but sufficient to work from.

"One thing emerges clearly. It is the nature and personality of our unknown friend. It is not too much to say that he must be very like what we have imagined him to be.

"A certain person appears dimly on the scene—this Major Helzephron. Let us see how his personality squares with the personality we have been deducing. Mr. Thumbwood has apparently collected some information. I have done so, too. Let us pool results."

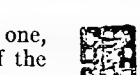
He looked at Charles, who blushed.

"Out with it, Charles; you've done splendidly," I said.

"Well, Sir John, I found out that this gentleman is a pretty bad wrong-'un, judging by the company he keeps. And he used to annoy Miss Shepherd something chronic. He'd wait at the stage-door and try to speak to her when she got into the car after the performance, and he was always leaving notes and flowers with the stage-door keeper. Miss Shepherd would never take them. She always sent them back from her room.

"It got so bad at last that she complained to the stage manager, and he had a plain-clothes man from Vine Street there one night. Major Helzephron was told off pretty plainly, I hear. He used to come very nasty sometimes, and once or twice he was fair blotto!

"And Mr. Meggit, the commission agent, knows him well. He's done a lot of racing in his time, and no open scandal. But he knows how to work the market, and the best men won't lay him the odds no more."



I SHRUGGED my shoulders. It was only what one expected. The man was one of the fast blackguards who infest the West End of London; that was all. There were dozens like him. The facts only seemed

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to prove that he could not possibly be connected with the Atlantic outrages.

"You see?" I said to the Japanese, sure that he would follow my thought.

Then I thanked good little Charles and he left the room.

"That is the surface," Danjuro replied. "I cross-examined a woman who was in constant attendance on Miss Shepherd. From her I learned just what your servant has discovered.

"But I went a little deeper. It is a case of genuine overmastering passion on the part of this man. Nothing less. He is of a dangerous age for that to come to him, certainly over forty-five years. A woman knows. But that is not all."

"So far we have learned nothing of importance."

I was getting restive; I wanted to be doing something. And yet what was there to do? If I had thought all night by myself I could not have mapped out the situation more clearly.

And as I looked at the little man, half-lost in a big saddle-bag chair, I felt ashamed of my irritation. A brain packed in ice was there, a logical machine of the first order.

I could not expect humanity, sympathy, from such a one. Still it would have helped! Hadn't I lost the one thing that made life worth living? What might not be happening to Connie even now?

He read my thoughts like a book, confound him!

"I understand your feelings, believe me, Sir John," he said, "but I must go my own way. We have not been talking for an hour yet. And if it is any consolation for you to know, let me say that it is imperative that we leave London tonight."

"My nerves are strained. Please go on," I answered. "I can hardly tell you what a god-send your appearance on the scene really is to me."

"In my business as agent and guard to my patron, Mr. Van Adams, it is always necessary that I keep more or less in touch with a certain circle of what I may describe as the aristocracy, the brains, of international crime. It has proved useful. After my visit to the Parthenon this morning I called upon an old acquaintance, the Honorable James Brookfield."

"Lord Slidon's son? The man who got five years——"

"Yes. Of course every one knows his name. He made one little slip. Mr. Brookfield is very acute, and a great student of character. Entirely incapable of understanding a man or woman of decent morals and normal instincts, he is infallible in his judgment of the criminal type. Mr. Brookfield owes me any little service he can render, and I supplemented my request for information with a note for fifty pounds."

"And you learned——"

"That Major Helzephron is all we have just heard, but a far more sinister and formidable person than any one suspects. He is a man of marked intellectual powers. Below the veneer of coarse pleasures and fast life in London and Paris, there is something that glows like a hot coal.

"His appearances in town are irregular and fitful. His real life—Brookfield is certain of this—is lived far away from cities. And it is a life with a purpose."

Quite suddenly and unexpectedly Mr. Danjuro began to reveal himself.

The last words were spoken in a changed voice. The flatness and monotony had vanished. The words vibrated in the room, and I felt the thrill of them. It was the power of personality, and from then onward I was hand in glove with this bizarre thinking-machine that Fate had sent me.

I tried to emulate Danjuro's dispassionate and scientific method.

"It is curious," I said, "that a real intellect should care to spend part of its time in rake-helling round the low clubs, the gambling-rooms and stage-doors of London. Such a thing is known, but it is rare."

"You put your finger instantly upon what seems a weak spot in my character-sketch. But let us assume that it has been done with a deep motive."

"Ah!"

He knew, or suspected, something more. He referred to his note-book.

"Two years ago a certain Mr. Herbert Gascoigne was expelled from Christ Church College, Oxford."

"Sent down, we call it; but go on."

"The case was a bad one. The young man had established a sort of gambling-club and ruined several of his contemporaries. It was discovered that he was using a roulette-wheel that had been tampered with.

"He came to London and drifted into the worst gang of swindlers. Major Helzephron met him. They became very friendly. The younger man was obviously under the influence of the elder. Finally Gascoigne deserted his old haunts and has disappeared."

I began to see light.

"On several occasions my astute friend Mr. Brookfield has witnessed precisely the same phenomenon. Some young man of the upper classes has been ruined socially and our enigmatic friend has taken him up, been seen about with him, and so forth. Finally the young man vanishes."

"It is not philanthropy, Mr. Danjuro."

"It is not, and it gives rise to curious speculations. Where could a Napoleonic criminal, patiently planning and meditating a stupendous coup, find a better recruiting-ground than among the desperate and ruined young men of his own class?

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"The plan is in itself evidence of genius. They speak his language; he understands their way of thought; there are a thousand bonds between them. I can conceive no more solid and formidable combination than just this.

"The one last virtue remaining to these desperate and outcast young men will be loyalty to their leader. Society has cast them out; therefore they will make war on society.

"Given that attitude of mind, a leader like Major Helzephron and a plan so daring, and the thing becomes plain as daylight. And if this man had not fallen into an overmastering passion for Miss Shepherd there would have been no means of getting on his trail at all."

IT WAS only with great difficulty that I could control my thoughts. We seemed miles nearer the truth than I had been an hour ago. Then one idea emerged clearly.

"Quite so. And isn't it all in our favor that we, and we alone, are in a position to connect Helzephron with the piracy? He will think himself perfectly secure?"

"I do not for a moment believe," Danjuro replied with emphasis, "that a single soul besides ourselves has the least suspicion. The man will have taken supreme care to cover his tracks.

"My inquiries could have suggested nothing to the people I interviewed. Mr. Brookfield thinks I required my information for quite another reason.

"Yes, Sir John, we have a task of immense difficulty and danger before us. You must recognize that to the full. My sincere belief is that it would be somewhat safer to venture into a cage of cobras than where we have to go.

"But"—he took out his watch—"it is five o'clock. Let us say that the game begins at this moment! Very well. We, and not the enemy, have scored the first point!"

He suddenly glided from his chair with a single sinuous movement. As he stood up he was transformed.

The bland modern look faded from his face. It grew terrible. The eyes narrowed to slits of light, the square jaw protruded, the gray lips were caughts up in a tiger-grin, and the slim body seemed to swell out with iron muscle like a wrestler stripped in the arena about to do battle.

You have seen some of the real old Japanese color-prints, pictures of the ancient *samurai* or the frightful *akudogi* shouting at you—yes? The flat, awful stolidity, the incarnate hate.

Then you have seen something of what I saw then, when the hidden ferocity of the man was revealed to me.

Wow! Millionaire Van Adams was well served!

CHAPTER VII

THE CURIOUS FIGHT IN THE RESTAURANT

"IT IS a good deal to ask, Sir John," said Danjuro briskly, "but for the moment will you place yourself entirely in my hands?"

"I am perfectly content to do so."

"Then permit me to press the bell." He did so.

"I left a black bag in the hall," Danjuro said politely when Thumbwood came in. "Would you please let me have it?"

The bag was brought. Danjuro placed it on the table and opened it.

"You are very well known, Sir John," he remarked. "Major Helzephron and his friends have either seen you at some time or other, or have certainly seen the numerous pictures of you that have appeared in the newspapers during the last few days.

"It is imperative that you change your appearance at once. I foresaw that and have brought materials."

I am afraid I whistled with dismay. The idea didn't please me in the very least.

"Is it really necessary?"

"Absolutely. But it will not inconvenience you. Will you go into your bedroom and clip off your mustache with scissors, afterward shaving the upper lip clean? You see, the man who leaves London tonight must not in the least resemble the Chief Commissioner of Air Police."

I went and did it. I had to. When the operation was over I shouldn't have known myself, it made such a difference. I never knew that I had such a grim and forbidding mouth!

I returned to the sitting-room. Mr. Danjuro did not make the least comment, but he removed my collar and tie with the deftness of a barber and fastened a towel round my neck.

Then he sponged my skin all over with some faintly pink stuff out of a bottle. When he had done that he began on my hair with something else, and finally my eyebrows.

"May I ask what you are doing?" I said after a time.

"I am dyeing your hair black, Sir John. The dye can be removed at any time. The appearance is absolutely natural.

"The drug I am using is not generally known. I procure it from a friend in the Honcho Dori at Yokohama, and also the liquid which has already changed your skin from blond to swarthy. I will treat your hands in a minute."

I suppose I was three-quarters of an hour under his ministrations before he stepped back and looked at me critically.

"Part your hair in the center instead of at the side, wear a low collar instead of a high one and spectacles—they can be of plain glass—and you need not have the slightest fear of

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recognition. In fact, Sir John, as far as outward appearance goes you have already ceased to exist!"

There was a mirror over the mantel-shelf. I stood up and looked. It was marvelous! It was uncanny, too. A dark-haired, dark-skinned stranger leered out of the glass at me, and I turned away with mingled feelings of amazement and disgust.

"Do you drive an automobile?" the Japanese asked.

I jumped at the suddenness of the question, for my thoughts were far away.

"Yes; I have a touring-car of my own in a neighboring garage."

"It will be better not to use it. We shall take one of Mr. Van Adams' cars. It is ready."

I laughed.

"I've a lot to hear yet, you know, Mr. Danjuro, though I have placed myself in your hands without reserve. But you made very sure of me beforehand, didn't you?"

"It is Mr. Van Adams' command," he answered simply; and I reflected that here indeed was a man with a single soul.

"We shall leave London at midnight," he went on, "and drive through the whole of the night. I also am an expert chauffeur, and we can relieve each other."

"Thumbwood can drive, too. Of course we take him with us?"

"He will be of the greatest assistance. Now, Sir John, if you want to take a little sleep now is the time. I should like to consult with your servant, if I may, and have a chat with him. We shall have a good deal to do with one another."

Strangely enough I did feel drowsy, despite my excitement. A couple of hours' sleep would refresh me wonderfully, and I knew it.

"Very well; I think it is a good suggestion. Say for two hours."

"By all means. I will carry out some other arrangements meanwhile. You shall have full explanations later on, and I thank you sincerely for the confidence you have reposed in me."

While we were talking we had left the room and crossed the hall.

"A pleasant sleep," he said, politely opening the door for me. "We will go and have a look at Major Helzephron later on."

"What?" I shouted.

"He is in London. I have never seen him and I must certainly do so."

"In London?" I cried, a dozen conflicting thoughts crowding and crushing into my mind.

"It is the reason that we leave London tonight."

Then he had shut the door on me and was gone. I had known him less than two hours. I was a man accustomed to rule, whose whole life was spent in giving orders, and I lay down on my bed like a lamb without a further question. And what is more I did exactly as Mr. Danjuro had said. I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

AT A LITTLE after eight Mr. Danjuro and myself sat at dinner at the Restaurant Mille Colonnes. Most people know that expensive and luxurious home of epicures, with Nicholas, its stout and arrogant proprietor, and M. Dulac, its famous chef.

We sat in the south gallery at the extreme end against the wall. The electric lights in the roof above us had been extinguished, and our table was lighted by candles in red shades. Indeed, we sat in a sort of darkness which must have made us almost invisible to the other diners, most of whom sat in the longer arm of the gallery at right angles to our own.

We, on the contrary, could see everything. We could look over the gilded rail into the hall of the restaurant below, and every detail of the gallery on our own level was clear and distinct, though there was such a towering erection of flowers and ferns in the center of our table that it obscured what would otherwise have been a perfect view.

I wore a low, turned-down collar and a dark flannel suit. Danjuro also had changed his clothes and in some real but indefinite way his appearance. He wore a flannel suit and a straw hat, and also a necktie which I suddenly spotted as that of my old college, Christ Church, Oxford. But the extraordinary thing about him was that he seemed fifteen years younger.

He had promised to explain at the Mille Colonnes. As we began upon the salted prawns and the stuffed olives he did so.

"You are now Mr. Johns, an Oxford tutor, Sir John. I am a young Japanese gentleman—my own name will serve—whom you are coaching.

"We are going into the country with this disguise. It is one which will easily account for your being in the company of an Asiatic gentleman, and which you will have no difficulty in sustaining."

It was indeed a simple and excellent plan for avoiding undue curiosity. I said so, and then:

"Now perhaps you will tell me where we are going. I have my ideas——"

"We are going west," he answered gravely. "To Cornwall."

My heart beat fast. It was what I wanted him to say.

"To the home of Helzephron?"

"Yes. For it is there we shall be in the very center of the web. In those far western solitudes, despite the recent opening up of the duchy to tourists, there are still vast spaces of lonely moorland and unvisited coast where one may walk for half a day and meet no living soul.

"There is a great *hinterland* between the little town of St. Ives and the Land's End that for

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all practical purposes is unknown and unexplored. Later on I will show you certain maps. It is in one of the remotest spots of all that Major Helzephron has his house.

"I tell you, Sir John," he continued with a sort of passion, "that in those lost and forgotten solitudes where England stretches out her granite foot to spurn the Atlantic strange secrets lie hid today! On the those gray and lonely moors, where the last Druids practised their mysterious rites, and which are still covered with sinister memorials of the past, lies the explanation of the terror which is troubling the world! There and there only shall we discover the secrets of the air, and—if human skill and determination are of any avail—Miss Constance Shepherd!"

An obsequious waiter came with iced consommé. He was followed by the great Nicholas himself, bulging out of his buttoned frock-coat —Nicholas never wore evening dress—who bowed low and had a whispered confabulation with Danjuro.

I remarked on this unusual honor.

"I do what I wish here," the Japanese replied. "It is of course through Mr. Van Adams. I hold this place in the hollow of my hand—as you will presently see."

He gave one of his rare and weary smiles, and then said quietly:

"Please do not get up or move. Major Helzephron has just come into the gallery."

I could not have moved. His words turned me to stone.

"I felt sure," he went on, "that for a day or two Helzephron would show himself in London. Knowing what we know—or at least suspect—such a move was a certainty. He is in the habit of coming here. He booked his usual seat at this restaurant and his usual box at the Parthenon Theater—and for reasons obvious to you and me, if to no one else in the world, I confess to an anxiety to look upon this man."

"You have had this corner darkened?" I said quickly. "No one can see *us* here?"

"Not clearly. And Helzephron would not know who we are if he did see us. But as he is sure to come upon us in Cornwall it is better to take no risks. To that end I have had a little device arranged for us which proved of great service to me once in Chicago."

He bent forward to the mass of ferns and flowers in the center of the table, disarranging the greenery at it base. At once a green-painted tube became visible, and then a slanting mirror, the size of a post-card.

"What on earth is that?" I whispered.

"An adaptation of the periscope," he replied, taking a magnifying-glass from his pocket, adjusting it and bending over the mirror. "The lens is focused upon Helzephron's table. With this magnifier I enlarge the image in the mirror. Ah! So that is the honorable gentleman!"

A FAINT hissing noise came from him. His face stiffened into fixed and horrible intentness as he stared through his magnifier at the little oblong of mirror.

"*Shi-ban, go-ban, heil*" he muttered. "There are two, then. I expect the younger man is the Honorable Herbert Gascoigne, of whom we have heard!"

The hissing noise continued; the ecstasy of attention did not relax for two or three minutes.

At last Danjuro looked up. His face, which had seemed carved out of jade, relaxed.

"Will you take my seat?" he said politely, handing me his reading-glass. "A little drama will commence in a few minutes. It will interest you."

I gave him a glance of interrogation as we exchanged chairs.

"We shall be in Cornwall tomorrow, and in advance of our friends," he whispered. "But in order that we may carry out our preliminary inquiries quite undisturbed I have thought out a little plan by which, if all goes well, Major Helzephron will be detained in London for a day or two—you will see."

Trembling with eagerness I stared down at the mirror.

The periscope was perfectly focused. The addition of the reading-glass made everything perfectly clear.

Two men in evening clothes were seated at a table. Their heads were close together, and they were talking earnestly. One was a tall, handsome boy of two-and-twenty with a fair complexion and a reckless, dissipated cast of face. Young as he was, evil experience had marked him, and his smile was that of a much older man.

But I cast scarcely a glance on him as I stared at the colored, moving miniature of Hawk Helzephron. The man's face was deeply tanned; above the brows a magnificent dome of white forehead went up to a thatch of dark-red hair—the forehead of a thinker if ever I saw one.

The face below was seamed and lined everywhere. The thin nose curved out and down like that of a bird of prey. The mouth was large, well-shaped, but compressed, the chin a wedge of resolution. And as he talked I saw a pair of slightly protruding eyes, cold and fierce. The whole aspect of the man was ferocious and formidable to a degree.

"Watch!" whispered Danjuro.

I watched, and this is what I saw:

Into the picture came a thick-set, brutal-looking man, with a blazing diamond in his shirt-front. He was passing Helzephron's table when his dinner jacket caught a wine-glass and swept it to the floor.

The hawk-faced man looked up with a scowl and said something just as the portly Nicholas and a waiter appeared in the background as if passing casually by.

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The thick-set man bent down till his face was close to Helzephron's. He said something also with an unpleasant smile.

Instantly Helzephron leaped up and drove his fist full into the other's face.

The fight that followed ended very speedily. The thick-set man took the blow calmly. Then, without heat and in a fashion which instantly told me the truth of the matter, he set about Helzephron, hitting him where and when he chose, until a shouting crowd of guests and waiters separated the combatants and a policeman and commissionaire hurried them away from the gallery.

During all the tumult Mr. Danjuro sat quietly smoking a cigaret.

"That was Mr. Wag Ashton, the pugilist," he remarked. "Honorable Nicholas and the waiter saw that the honorable Helzephron struck him first. I think the major will be resting for a day or two before Mr. Ashton summons him for assault."

I felt faint with surprize and amazement.

"So you, you arranged——"

He interrupted me:

"Now let us finish our dinner in peace," he said. "Some river trout, *meunie*, are coming."

An hour afterward with myself at the wheel a huge sixty horse-power limousine, loaded with luggage and with Messrs. Danjuro and Thumbwood inside, was rolling down the Piccadilly slope.

To Penzance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HUNTING INSTINCT IS STIMULATED BY A PROCESSION

THE big car rolled down Piccadilly. She was a beauty to handle, as I discovered in the first two minutes. The very latest type of electric starter, a magnificent lighting installation—every convenience was ready to my hand. I was in an extraordinary state of mind as I steered the car through the late theater and restaurant traffic, purely mechanically and without conscious thought about it.

The predominant sensation was one of immense overwhelming relief at the prospect of action. Mere office activities, the planning of guard and patrol ships, conferences with pilots and officials, had been quite powerless to calm the terrible fever of unrest within me.

It was commanding other people to do things, not doing them myself. I knew all the time that I should have been happier piloting one of the war-planes over the Atlantic.

Now at any rate I was doing something real. I was actually setting out, in my own person, upon a definite quest.

It might be all moonshine. I was well aware that many hard-headed people would have laughed at this expedition, considering the slender evidence I had. They would have talked about "circumstantial evidence," the folly of pure assumption, and so forth. "Behold, this dreamer cometh!" would have been their attitude.

And although I was driving the big car up Park Lane for Oxford Street and the road to the West, I did feel as if I were in a dream. My whole life had been altered by the events of the past few days, ruined forever it might be.

Tonight its stream was violently diverted from its course. Everything with which I was familiar had flashed away, and I was on the brink of the fantastic and unknown. There was not a man in London, setting out upon so strange an errand, under circumstances so unprecedented, as I was this night.

We slid by a huge white house set back from the railings and with all its windows looking out over the Park. It was the London palace that Mr. Van Adams had built for himself during the last five years, and the strangeness of my affair was intensified at the sight.

Only a few hours ago the great man had been sitting in my chambers and introducing the enigmatic figure that sat behind me in the car. Here was a dream figure indeed!

It was impossible to think of Danjuro as a human being. He was just a brain, a specialized force, devoted to one object, and probably, as Van Adams had hinted, the supreme force of its kind in existence.

Already I had placed myself in his hands, and not only my personal interests, dear as those were to me, but my responsibilities to the State as well, and that was no small thing for him to have achieved in so short a space of time. The unique detachment and concentration that was sitting behind me had an almost magical effect upon one's mind and will. With such help surely I could not fail.

I fell to thinking of what the Japanese had already achieved, the quiet and masterly skill of his analysis, the cold audacity of his plot to keep Helzephron in London, the neatness and finish of his operations as witnessed by the periscope upon the dinner-table at the Mille Colonnes. Surely Helzephron, or whoever was the master-criminal, was a doomed man with Danjuro on his track.

WE WERE running out of Ealing now, and traffic was almost gone in the long, straight westward road among the acres of market-gardens and glass houses that fringe the western approach to the metropolis. I let out the powerful engines, and as the car leaped like a spurred horse my heart leaped up into anger at the name Helzephron.

Connie—poor, lost Connie—had told me herself how the man had pestered her, and I had seen him at Paddington with my own eyes.

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The investigations at the Parthenon Theater by Thumbwood and Danjuro had put the details in the picture, and an ugly one it was. The man, V.C. as he was, had a bad reputation enough. I had watched him that very evening, marked every line upon the hawk-like, cruel face, and thrilled when the vulgar pugilist attacked him. It was the next best thing to thrashing him myself!

Yet—I record this as an interesting point of my psychology at the beginning of the enterprise—I was disgusted with and loathed the man only. I did not hate him, for I found it even now impossible to believe that he was the abductor of my girl.

Understand me if you can. Danjuro had convinced my intellect, but not my heart. My state was the reverse of the ordinary state in such a situation.

Plenty of people believe in anything—a religion for example—by faith, and can not justify their faith intellectually. Their belief is always confident and strong.

I believed intellectually but had no faith, which was why this quest seemed shadow-like and a thing in a dream. No doubt the long night drive and my curious companion—I was always conscious of him—intensified the impression of unreality.

About three in the morning Danjuro spoke through the tube and insisted on relieving me. I stopped the huge car in a dark, tree-bordered road, where the moonlight lay in pools and patches of silver, and exchanged seats with the little man.

As I stood on the road and stamped to restore the circulation the night breeze rustled in the leaves, and far away I heard the nightjar spinning. Never was such a still and solitary place. Danjuro's face in the moonlight seemed as immobile and lifeless as one of those Japanese masks of wax with eyes of opalescent glass that you can buy in the Oriental shops.

I got inside and, suddenly weary, sank back in the luxuriously cushioned seat. The car started again, and Thumbwood switched on a light in the roof. He produced a thermos flask of hot soup, which I found delicious and refreshing.

"How have you been getting on with Mr. Danjuro?" I inquired.

"Very well, thank you, Sir John. He knows everything, I do believe.

"If there's one thing where I should detect a man who was talking through 'is 'at it's 'osses. Stands to reason. But this gentleman knows 'osses like a blooming trainer, sir. And as for the games of the crooks in the ring and on the course, he's wide to every one of 'em.

"I generally carries a pack of cards in my pocket, sir, and I've got one with me now. The things 'e showed me passes belief. I've seen a good deal of that sort of work, but Mr. Danjuro's an easy winner. I wouldn't play poker with 'im—no, nor 'alfpenny nap—for a fistful o' thick 'uns!"

We breakfasted at Exeter, and I had the opportunity of a shave and a bath. I remember that when I was half-way up the hotel stairs a horrid thought struck me, and I hurried down again to consult Danjuro.

How would the stuff he had put on my skin stand hot water and soap?

He reassured me, however. Nothing would remove the beastly stuff but a preparation he carried with him, and I bathed in peace.

It was a beautiful morning when we started again, and for many miles our route lay close to the smiling Devon sea. The waves were sapphire blue, framed in the red sandstone rocks and the sky resembled a great hollow turquoise. It was a bright morning, and one side of me rejoiced in it; but the thought of my girl was always there, a constant sullen pain, for which the morning held no anodyne.

Thumbwood drove on this stretch of the journey, and Danjuro sat inside studying innumerable maps, and now and then making notes in a pocketbook. I wondered what thoughts were seething and bubbling behind that massive dome of skull.

APART from the scenery there was plenty to interest a Commissioner of Air Police. The sky was speckled with small private planes, converging upon Plymouth or Exeter from many a pleasant country residence.

There was no longer any need for the professional man or the prosperous tradesman to live within a very few miles of his place of business. Men flew to their day's work, and from considerable distances, and as a matter of course.

A mile or two out at sea one distinguished the large, steady-going passenger air-ships by which England was now ringed, and occasionally the royal-mail boats cut the sky like javelins.

More than once I spotted one of my police patrols. It was curious to remember that I, who sat here with a stained face and shaven lips, bowling along the Devon roads at a miserable forty miles an hour, had supreme control of all those aerial argosies.

There were few cars upon the roads at this early hour. Contrary to general opinion fifteen years ago, the popularity of flying had by no means killed the automobile. It had lessened their numbers in an appreciable degree and made the roads more pleasant.

I should of course have preferred to reach our destination, or at any rate to have traveled the greater part of the way toward it, by airship. But the system of registration and the police regulations—framed by myself—would have given too much away. My actual identity

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and purpose might not have been discovered, but we should have been easily traced, and Helzephron—if he was what we suspected—would be the first to hear of a private aeroplane making its appearance in the solitudes where he lived.

Toward midday we were approaching Plymouth when I began to feel uneasy. The agony I had endured there a day or two ago when Thumbwood burst into my bedroom with news of the *Atlantis* disaster, clouded my memory. I felt that I never wished to see the pride of Devon again. This thought was merely weakness which I crushed down.

More practical considerations occurred to me. I made Charles stop the car and got inside with Danjuro.

"Look here," I said; "hadn't we better run straight through the town and get on into Cornwall? We can lunch at St. Germans or somewhere."

"You have some special reason for avoiding Plymouth, Sir John?" Danjuro asked politely.

"Well, it's the air-port for America. One of my largest stations is there. Dozens and dozens of people know me. I've always been a familiar figure in Plymouth, and never more so than lately, of course."

The Japanese gave his little weary smile.

"I do not think you realize the alteration in your appearance," he said. "I assure you, and I am an expert in these matters, that no one at all would ever recognize you. I had proposed to stop in Plymouth for at least a couple of hours."

"Why, exactly?"

"For several reasons. One is that I shall be able to purchase some local Cornish maps and a directory or two, which I need and found no opportunity of procuring in London.

"But that is not all. Here we are in the very center of air matters, as far as the Atlantic is concerned. The place is still seething with excitement. Nothing else but the piracies is spoken of. The town is packed with correspondents of the principal European newspapers. It is in a ferment. I must wish to go about with my ears open for an hour or two.

"I do think, Sir John, that it would be unwise to neglect this opportunity, for you as well as myself. There is no knowing what we may pick up."

"You're certain about my disguise?"

"Perfectly certain. You will not, of course, enter into long conversations with any one who knows you well, as your voice would betray you. Otherwise you may rest secure."

"Yes, that's the weak point," I replied. "I've always heard that, however perfectly a man may be disguised, you can not disguise his voice."

He rolled a cigaret with the quick snatching movement of his fingers that always struck me as a miracle of dexterity.

"It is not true," he remarked. "I have invented five methods, three mechanical and two medical or chemical, whichever you like to call them. When we have leisure I will show you. But there is no need for anything of the sort in your case.

"It will give you confidence, Sir John, to test the completeness of your appearance. If you will go to the Royal Hotel and lunch there—keeping awake to hear the general talk—I will join you about three."

"Very well," I replied, though with some reluctance. "And the car?"

"Mr. Thumbwood has been with you at the Royal, and he is not disguised. It would be better that he should not approach the hotel. We will put you down a short distance away. I will remain in the car and direct Thumbwood where to go."

Nothing escaped this little man. He seemed to foresee and provide for everything, and when I alighted five minutes afterward some two hundred yards from the hotel I felt fairly secure in my new character as Mr. Johns, the don of Christ Church, Oxford.

IMMEDIATELY I was in the street I became aware—you know how one does?—that the Japanese was right, and Plymouth was in a ferment. London is too vast for anything but a national calamity to make any alteration in the outward appearance of things, and even then it takes a sharp eye and a man well versed in the psychology of crowds to detect anything unusual. Not so a big provincial town.

As I walked along the classic façade of the theater and turned the corner to the main entrance of the hotel I saw one thought on every face and heard one single topic of discussion. The streets, always so gay and cheerful with military and naval uniforms, seemed more crowded than their wont, and there was a definite electricity in the air. I know that I felt stimulated, encouraged to persist, and as I ascended the massive steps of the hotel my clean-shaven lips smiled to think with what interest I should be regarded if any one had but an inkling of who I was and upon what mission.

And then I had a shock.

Standing in the big lounge-hall, and talking to a man in a black morning-coat and a silk hat, was my second in command—Muir Lockhart, Assistant Commissioner of Air Police! He was in uniform, a special uniform that we both wore upon ceremonial occasions only.

"Yes," he was saying, "I'm down here representing the chief."

I dared not stay to listen, but I walked toward them as slowly as I could. Muir Lockhart has a somewhat high, penetrating voice.

"When did you come down?" asked the other man.

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"Arrived half an hour ago; flew down from Whitehall this morning," said Muir Lockhart.

"Then Sir John Custance isn't coming?"

My assistant shook his head.

"Utterly impossible," he said. "Sir John can not leave town just now. He must be at the head of things; can't possibly be spared. I saw him this morning before I left; he had been working all night and was nearly dead.

" 'Explain my position to them,' he said; 'nothing but strict duty would keep me away from Plymouth today.'

"So you see how it is, Mr. Mayor?"

"Oh, quite, quite! Well, I must be getting round to the Guildhall. You will march up your men at half-past one? Thank you."

The man in the silk hat, who I realized must be the mayor of Plymouth, hurried away. I was left face to face with Muir Lockhart.

He stared at me, not offensively but in such a way that he could not have missed a detail of my appearance; he always was an observant beggar. Then he passed by without a sign of recognition. Good! I reflected, if my own colleague, who saw me for several hours each day, did not know me, no one else would. It seemed a good omen, and I blessed Danjuro in my heart.

And what a splendid liar Muir Lockhart was! He knew that I had gone away on my own, and and he hadn't the least idea in the world where I was. It was a temptation to discover myself, but I refrained.

I was very puzzled. What on earth was he doing here in uniform, and talking to the mayor about? I hadn't a suspicion of the truth even then, and I had a curious sense of being out of things, forgotten and on the scrap-heap.

The long drive had made me hungry and I thought about lunch. Before going into the coffee-room I wished to remove the stains of travel, so I went down the corridor to the lavatory.

When I entered a man in his shirt sleeves was bending over one of the basins and sluicing himself with many splashes. As I was washing my own swarthy hands he emerged from a towel and gave me a casual glance.

It was Mr. Van Adams.

I COULD not repress a violent start, the thing was so sudden. What did this gathering of the clans mean?

He noticed my movement at once, and looked at me with inquiry in his eyes. The lavatory was quite empty save for our two selves, and my decision was taken at once.

"Mr. Van Adams?" I asked.

"Sure!" he replied. "You have the floor—shoot!"

"You don't know me?"

"Not from the great Lum-tum, though your voice is kind of homy."

"I'm Sir John Custance. Danjuro's been faking me up. He's down here with me."

"Gee!" said Mr. Van Adams. "Aren't you the fresh thing now, Sir John? So you're down for the obsequies incog? That's what I've come for—matter of respect. Flew down from Park Lane after breakfast."

"I'm on my way west. We only stopped here for an hour or two, as Danjuro had some business."

"I've ordered lunch in a private room overlooking the square. Come right up, Sir John; you'll be able to see everything from there."

"Thank you. But I'm still in the dark. I'm right away from the office now, as you know. I saw Commissioner Muir Lockhart here just now, but I couldn't speak to him."

He took me by the arm and led me along the corridor to the lift.

"Captain Lashmar of your force and the five men of the patrol boat are being buried today," he said; "also Captain Swainson of the *Atlantis* and the boys murdered on his ship."

I flushed under my dye. I had never heard a word of it. I felt an absolute beast as we entered the private room, and I tried to explain to the millionaire.

"Think you callous and unfeeling?" he said in answer. "Guess I know better than that, my friend. You're out to prevent just such a spectacle as we're going to witness from ever happening again. You're playing a better game than prancing along at the head of a procession. You're getting busy at the heart of things.

"Now sit down and share the pork bosom and beans, or whatever they've given us. And tell me all about it."

We sat down to lunch, and after a glass of Burgundy I told Van Adams of all that had occurred and also expressed my complete confidence in Danjuro.

"You're right," he said. "There isn't an investigator on the globe that'd carry a tune to him. He has his orders to stick to you right through and he'll carry them out. That little man's got a brain like the Mammoth Cave, and he's without human passions, save only one—he'd go to —— in a paper suit for me. See here——"

And the millionaire told me a string of anecdotes about the uncanny little Jap that would make the fortune of a writer of romance.

He was still on the same subject when he stopped in the middle of a sentence.

The noise in the square outside was suddenly hushed, and we heard a muffled chord of music. Rising from our chairs, we went to the windows. Everywhere as far as eye could reach was a black sea of heads, from among which the slender clock-tower on its island in the center rose like a sentinel.

The pavements were lined by troops, soldiers and sailors in equal proportions, and there was a flutter as of falling leaves as every head was

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bared and the piercing sweetness of Chopin's "Funeral March" filled all the air.

Then they came, following the band—thirteen coffins covered with flowers, thirteen heroes who would never slant down the long reaches of the upper air again.

After the hearses walked Paget and Fowles, the two heroic airmen who had called the rescuing ship by wireless, and then came the chaplains and Muir Lockhart.

For my part I saw the whole procession in a dream. The head of the Transatlantic Air Line, the mayor and corporation in their robes—the stately, funeral pomp of it all seemed unsubstantial and unreal.

Mr. Van Adams was kneeling a yard or two away from the window. His head was bent; he had a crucifix and a string of golden beads in his hands and was saying prayers. Who would have thought it of this master of millions with the pike-like jaw? I suppose he was a Catholic.

But my mind was far away, above the heaving wastes of the Atlantic, and I saw an unnamed, unknown ship rushing through the air at a speed undreamed of hitherto in the history of flight. And in the pilot's seat I had a vision of a hawk-faced man with cruel eyes and a smile upon his hard, thin lips.

I stood there for so long that the very tail of the procession was passing by, and Mr. Van Adams rose from his prayers with the sign of the cross and touched me on the arm.

"Look!" he said, pointing down into the street.

I followed his finger and saw Danjuro standing on the opposite curb. He was looking after the cortège, and his face, with the expression on it, was quite clear to see.

In an instant I came out of my dream.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN WITH THE WICKED FACE

ON THE morning after our arrival I stepped out of my bedroom window at Penzance and stood upon the balcony.

Many times had I flown over Cornwall; never had I set foot in the duchy until now. Plymouth had always been my farthest west.

The sea was blue as the Mediterranean, the sky a huge hollow turquoise, the air all Arabia. Away in the bay St. Michael's Mount, crowned with towers, gleamed like a vision of the New Jerusalem in some old monkish missal—and the heart within me was so hard, stern, and full of deadly purpose that no Summer seas nor balmy western winds could touch the rigor of my mood.

For we were on the battle-field now. There was no more vagueness nor speculation. I, in the place I occupied, owed a debt to society, and to myself a personal and bitter revenge. And those debts should be paid.

Danjuro knocked and entered the bedroom. Yesterday afternoon within half an hour of our arrival at Penzance he had disappeared, telling me not to wait up for him as he could not say what time he would return. I accordingly went to bed early, for I was tired out, and I had not seen him until now.

"I have been very busy, Sir John," he said. "In the characters of a mining engineer at one place and agent for a foreign shipping firm at another I have been making some very necessary inquiries. I engaged a local motor—our own would hardly have suited the part—and I have covered a great deal of country."

"And your exact object?"

"I have two. One is to discover any private engineering works where special engines could have been made in secret. You will remember that we both came to the conclusion that the Air Pirate could have obtained silent engines in no other way. The other is—petrol."

"Petrol! I never thought of that! I see what you mean."

"Precisely, Sir John. An air-ship such as the one we are after must have a constant supply of petrol, and of course consumes enormous quantities. When I can connect a certain private individual with the receipt of such quantities we are another step forward."

"How have you got on?" I asked eagerly.

"I have nothing definite. But there are certain indications—slight; oh, very slight!—which I am following up. I will go into everything with you this evening. Meanwhile you have your own day mapped out?"

"Yes. I have studied the local maps and asked a good many questions. After breakfast I shall walk over the moors to this little lonely village of Zerran. It is about eight miles away from here, and, I understand, not more than one and a half from Tregeraint Sea House, which is the home of Major Helzephron. There is a fair-sized old-fashioned inn on the cliffs where we shall probably be able to get rooms."

"And settle down to our reading-party," he replied with a sudden gleam in his narrow eyes. "I have the Greek texts of Plato's 'Republic' and the 'Meno' in my portmanteau; it is wise to pay attention to details! We shall then meet at dinner this evening, and I expect that your news will be of great importance. With your permission I shall take honorable Thumbwood with me. He will be useful."

After breakfast, with some sandwiches and a flask I set out, passing down the main street of the far western town and by the last station in England, till I found myself mounting a winding road which led upward through a suburb toward the moorlands.

The air was heavy with the perfume of innumerable flowers. Tall palm-trees grew in the

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gardens of old granite houses, a sub-tropical flora flourished everywhere, and it was difficult to believe that one was in England. The hedges were luxuriant with ferns that grow in hot-houses elsewhere—Royal Osmunda and Maid-enhair—and every moment the road grew steeper.

If you look at the map of Cornwall you will see that the extremity of the county forms a sort of peninsula. Penzance is on the south, and faces the English Channel on the south. My back was now turned to this and I was walking due north, toward my objective, the vast and little known *hinterland* of mountainous moor and savage coast which lies between the Channel and the Atlantic.

As I went, the warmth and color, the riot of Nature all round, seemed as unreal as a dream. It brought no ease or healing to my soul. Deep, deep down, though controlled and prisoned by the will, an unending agony was lying.

I'm not going to insist upon this, or often obtrude it in my story. But you must not think that until the very end I knew a moment's peace. My dear love and her awful fate were ever before me, and all the sights and sounds of Nature in this western paradise breathed nothing but her name.

AT LAST the habitations of man grew fewer. Gardens gave place to sloping fields enclosed by "hedges" of stone, and at length a long, level sky-line above and in front showed me that the moors were close.

I reached the top at last, and took in a great breath of the sweetest, most exhilarating air that I have ever known. The unfenced road stretched away ahead of me for miles, a long white ribbon laid upon the heath and yellow gorse. I was on a vast plateau of gold and brown and purple.

To the left great hills crowned with rock granite tors cut into the sky, and to the right was the jagged summit of Carne Zerran, three miles away as the crow flies. At its foot, on the edge of mighty cliffs that fell away a sheer three hundred feet to the ocean, I knew lay the little village that I sought.

I looked at my map for a moment, took out my pocket compass and then plunged into the heather. Already I had a good idea of the lie of the country—it is an instinct with your flying man—and I realized that an accurate knowledge of it would prove invaluable in the task before me.

I met no living soul during that first walk over the moor. Larks were singing high above in the blue; a pair of the rare Cornish choughs, with their scarlet bills, flew screeching from the summit of a lichen-covered rock as big as a house; but until I got to Carne Zerran, and looked down to the narrow strip of pasture-lands and corn-fields that lie along the cliffs, there was no sign of human habitation.

Far down below I saw a church-tower and a little cluster of gray houses. Beyond was the coast-line, with a creamy froth of breakers at the foot of the jagged cliffs, and the Atlantic, "Mother of Oceans," beyond. There was no land between me and New York.

I suppose that in all the glory of sun and color, superb spaces of sea and sky, I stood alone, and looked upon a scene as fair as any on this earth. But as I focused my binoculars and swept the coast my only thought was that here—if anywhere at all—was the heart of the mystery I had come to solve.

Well! It was a fitting setting in its lonely vastness. Anything might happen here among these Druid-haunted hills. A crafty fiend, a man with a great intellect and Satan in his soul, might well find this his proper theater!

About a mile from the village and just below me I saw the cliffs bent inward between two projecting headlands. This must be the Zerran Cove of the map, and—yes—seemingly upon the very edge of the precipice was a long, gray building which could be none other than "The Miners' Arms."

I began the descent, leaping from rock to rock, where the adders lay basking in the sun. After a few hundred yards I struck a gorge, through which a stream fell toward the sea. Here I found a well-defined path which looped downward to the ruins of a deserted tin-mine.

I saw as I passed it the windowless engine-house and the gaunt timbers of the winding-gear still in place. The gibbet-like structure and the dumps of useless stuff covered with rank dock-leaves made a forlorn and ugly picture in that narrow gorge where the sun hardly penetrated.

I passed it soon and came out upon the main coach-road from St. Ives to Land's End and, crossing this, found a side-lane which took me direct to the remote hostelry I had seen from the heights above.

It was a large place covered with ivy, and no doubt did a considerable trade eighty years before, when the innumerable tin-mines on the moor were all at work. Now it seemed forgotten by the world, and all asleep in the sun.

"An ideal base for our operations!" I thought as I strode through an open door into a long, low room with a stone floor and heavily timbered roof.

It was cool, and so dark after the blazing sunshine that for a moment I could see nothing, though I heard a sound of stertorous breathing. When my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I saw that there was a man asleep by the little counter.

He sat on a bench which ran along the wall, and his head was buried in his arms, which rested on a beer-stained table. By his side stood a bottle half full of whisky.

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Supposing him to be the landlord—and no engaging figure at that—I touched him on the shoulder. It was like springing a trap. Instantly he snatched away his arms and sat up.

For a second sleep held him. Then it passed away like a breath on glass, and if ever I saw fear on a man's face I saw it then.

He was dressed in a blue jersey and an alpaca coat, oil-stained and dirty. His hands were the hands of a mechanic, with grimy nails.

But it was his face that held me. It was sleek and cunning. There was a curious mixture of refinement and wickedness. He seemed like a naturally sensitive man whom circumstances, indulgence or some special temptation had led very deeply astray.

I noted all this while he stared at me with a drooping jaw and bloodshot eyes. His skin had turned dead white, like the belly of a fish, and whatever he was thinking I felt that I would not have that man's conscience for a million.

"I want you," I said—they were the first words that came.

He made an inarticulate noise.

"You are the landlord, aren't you?"

At that he gave a long breath and his rigidity relaxed. He snatched at the whisky-bottle, poured some into a glass and drank it off neat.

"Lord, how you startled me!" he said glibly. "I was far away—dreaming—and you frightened me out of my life."

It was my turn to be amazed, though I showed nothing. The fellow spoke with a cultivated voice and accent which were impossible to mistake. He was not what I had thought him.

"I am very sorry," I said; "you must please excuse me. But I naturally thought——"

"Of course you did!" he said, and a civil but ugly smile came on his clever, unpleasant face. "As a matter of fact, Trewhella, the landlord, has just gone to the village for a few minutes. He asked me to keep house for him. He's almost due back now."

Thanking him urbanely, I sat down, my mind working very quickly. He offered me some whisky, and though it was the last thing I wanted I accepted after a show of reluctance. He was watching me out of the corners of his eyes the whole time.

"Can you tell me," I said with great openness of manner, "if I can get rooms here or in Zerran village?"

He became alert at once.

"Rooms to stay in, do you mean?"

"Yes. I am an Oxford tutor, and I have a young foreign gentleman in my charge whom I am coaching. I want a quiet place for three or four weeks, and this seems ideal for the purpose."

His face cleared.

"I should imagine so," he replied. "I know Trewhella does let sometimes."

"You live here?" I remarked with polite indifference.

"I have been here for a year," he answered. "I am as a matter of fact a mining engineer—hence these clothes. I belong to a little private syndicate of friends who are opening up a disused tin-mine on the moor not far away.

"Ah, here is the landlord! Trewhella, this gentleman wishes to speak to you."

And then to me:

"Good morning, sir. No doubt if you come here I and my friends will see something of you. We are mostly public-school and university men ourselves, and we often look in here of an evening after our day's work."

He waved his hand and went out into the sunshine.

CHAPTER X

I COME UPON THE HOUSE OF HELZEPHRON

MR. TREWHELLA was an elderly Cornishman with welcoming manners, the native shrewdness of his race but without guile. We got on famously from the word "go." He had three bedrooms and a large sitting-room to let. His wife, who had driven into St. Ives, was, he asserted, a good cook.

As for Thumbwood he could wait on us and live with the landlord and his wife. Finally there was an empty barn which would hold our car very comfortably.

"And what would you be thinking of paying, zur?" asked Mr. Trewhella.

"I shall leave that to you. I may tell you that the gentleman I am preparing for his Oxford examination is wealthy. He is a Japanese nobleman, and as long as you make us comfortable——"

This had the desired effect. The landlord became expansive in his slow way and showed me all over the premises of his quaint and rambling dwelling.

It was a wild and fantastic spot, an ancient haunt of smugglers and wreckers, I learned. The back yard opened straight into the short springy turf above the cliffs, the brink of which was not more than two hundred yards away. Here the stream which flowed past the inn descended in a series of miniature cataracts to a tiny cove of deep-green water almost enclosed by two towering precipices, crowned with jagged spires and pinnacles of rock. There was a little similar of golden sand far down at the water's edge, and the scene was one of savage grandeur that I have rarely known surpassed in all my travels.

As I stood on the height and looked down I saw something which seemed strangely out of place. A line of street rails with wooden rollers

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at intervals between them fell at a dizzy angle from a spot some ten yards away on the turf, ending abruptly on the level, and in front of a smallish hut of corrugated iron.

"What is the rail for?" I asked. "Surely you don't haul the boats—" there were two of them lying on the beach—"right up to the top of the cliff. It must be two hundred and fifty feet."

"Nigher three hundred, zur. No. Them rails belong to bring up machinery and stores for Tregeraint Mine by Carne Zerran. They do come by sea in a li'l steamboat. 'Tes more convenient so.

"There be a li'l oil engine in that shed to haul 'em up in trucks. I let the land, for 'tes all mine down-along, and they do pay me ten pound a year."

We strolled back to the house, Mr. Trewhella proposing a Cornish pasty and beer for lunch.

"Now you mention it, that gentleman who was keeping house for you just now said that he was a mining engineer."

The landlord's big, weather-beaten face wrinkled like a stained window. He began to heave and chuckle, finally exploding in a bellow of laughter.

"Mr. Vargus!" he spluttered. "Mr. Vargus! He thinks he be a mining engineer, but a knows no more about it than my pig! He be a clever gentleman, sure 'nough. He do have some braave knowledge to machinery. I'll allow. But mining, and tin-mining!"

Mr. Trewhella could find no further words to express his contempt for the mining attainments of my friend with the refined and evil face.

"You see," the landlord continued as we ate our pasties, "I'm an old mine-captain myself, bred and born to it. 'Tedn't likely as I could be deceived. When I heered that a gentleman had come into Tregeraint Manor and the old mine and proposed to work it I laughed, I did. I know every inch of Wheal Tregeraint, and fifty years ago it was a fine property. Today them amatoors up along'll never get enough tin out to oxidize, let alone smelt."

"Who are they then, Mr. Trewhella?"

"That's what lots of folk asked when they first come here in twos and threes. They're gentlemen, zur, like yourself, that's what they are. Never was such a thing known in these parts, though folk are used to 'em now.

"There's Mr. Helzephron, a Cornishman himself and should know better; Mr. Vargus, you seed; Mr. Gascoigne, a mad young devil if you like; and near a dozen more. They all live together in the great house on the cliff and work the mine theyselves. Never no one else allowed. They cooks and does for themselves, just as if they was in a mining camp in California."

"No women, servants or anything?"

"Never an apron. My missus belong to say they lives like Popish monks, which she see when traveling with a lady among the Eyetalians.

"'Not so, my tender dear,' says I. 'I never heered that Popish monks spent most of their evenings in the village inn with a bottle of Scotch whisky afore each man, and precious little left by closing time!'"

"A hard-drinking lot then?"

"Wonderful at their liquor. I tell you, zur, it's good for me! Now I've got used to them and their funny ways I wish they'd stay forever. Speaking from a strictly business point of view, that is.

"But soon they'll find out they've lost their money and they'll jack it up. 'Tes not in reason as they can go on, though they do seem so full of hope and certainty, as you mind to up! But I *know*."

HE WAS obviously pleased with my interest in his talk. I wondered what he would have said if he had known who I was and why I was there. Under a calm exterior, a professor munching potato pasty!

I was filled with a furious excitement. The man's gossip was worth a sovereign a word. Here was moment by moment what looked like complete confirmation of our suspicions.

And yet even as I realized this I realized also how infernally clever the scheme was. Without the clue which Danjuro and myself alone possessed there was nothing in the world to connect Helzephron and Tregeraint with the business that was ruining the calm of two continents.

It was not my game to ask more direct questions than I could help. It was better to let the racy stream flow on, with a word of comment now and then. I ventured a calculated one now.

"Fools and their money are soon parted," said I.

"You may say that, zur! And they've poured out money like water. Electric light, o l sorts o' cases full of new-fangled machinery, and that mystery made about the silly old mine you'd think it was a seam of diamonds."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, Mr. Trewhella."

I rose from the table as I spoke.

"But what you say about a dozen or more gentlemen drinking nearly a bottle of whisky each rather surprizes me. I'm no foe to honest enjoyment, but——"

I put on a slight primness of manner, as became the character I sustained.

The landlord nodded vigorously.

"'Tes so!" he agreed. "And most onusual. They be gentlefolk, sure 'nough; but shall I tell 'ee what I think?"

"What's that?"

"I think as most of 'em's dropped out, so to speak. I shouldn't be frightened if as their families didn't have anything to say to 'em,

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and they've nowhere much else to go. Mr. Helzephron knows what he's about, he do.

"I judge by a kind o' reckless way they have, 'specially the younger gentlemen. They don't seem to mind about ordinary things same as most. Well, I suppose this fool tin-mining keeps 'em out of mischief."

I wondered.

WHEN I set out upon the return journey I took another route. I found from the landlord that by skirting the coast for a mile in the direction of St. Ives I could come upon a moorland path that would take me to the little railway station of St. Erth. I could then catch a train for Penzance.

My ostensible reason was to vary my walk, my real one that by this change of plan I should pass by and have a view of Tregeraint Mine and the Manor House.

"Not that you'll see much or get close," said Mr. Trewhella.

"How is that?" I asked.

"I told you that Mr. Helzephron—" apparently the hawk-faced man had dropped his military title in Cornwall—"do make a mystery of his peddling mine. He goes further than that. The mine buildings and the house are surrounded by two fences of barbed wire and the manor by a high wall. 'Trespassers,' notice boards belong to say, 'will be prosecuted with the utmost rigor of the law.'"

"Well, I sha'n't attempt to trespass, Mr. Trewhella."

The landlord laughed.

"Mine-prospectin's not in the way of a l'arned gentleman like yourself. Maybe it's as well. Mr. Helzephron has got two dogs he turns out at night, and terrible ugly customers they be.

"Mr. Vargus do tell me that they be Tibetan mastiffs, which am the largest dogs in the world. They look like a sour-faced Newfoundland with heavy ears, only bigger."

I tramped away from "The Miners' Arms." Although I recognized the fact that we were only at the fringe of discovery my mind was made up. Thick darkness surrounded me, but I was convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Major Helzephron and no other was the man for whom the whole world was hunting.

And as I thought of him and the crew of lost and reckless men who did his will the fair landscape seemed to darken, the sweet airs to be tainted.

The path I traversed was the coast-guard's path, as I could see by the whitewashed boulders to serve as a guide by night. It was never more than two or three yards away from the brink of the savage precipices that fell for two hundred and fifty feet sheer to the water.

The ocean was on my left; on the right the great hill, known as Carne Zerran, towered up, and the edge of the high moors cut the sky. On that side it was as if one were walking at the bottom of a cup.

After about half a mile the path suddenly left the cliff-edge and turned inland. For several hundred yards the brink was guarded by a semicircle of barbed-wire fence, which made it impossible to approach. A notice board informed the wayfarer that here owing to old mining operations the cliff was extremely dangerous.

It looked so, indeed. The edge was broken and irregular. I saw that it ran out in a curious headland for a considerably way, a mere wall of rock with a razor-back path on the top, which curved round again and ran parallel to the cliff on which I was, making a mighty chasm from which rose the cries of innumerable seabirds.

There was a narrow mouth seaward, and another headland jutted out to make a cove like the one at the inn, though that of course had no winding cañon at the end.

I crept up to the brink, where the wire fence began, and, lying down with one arm round the first post, peered over.

IT WAS a terrible place. The rock overhung so for hundreds of yards that I could not see the bottom. But the other side of the cañon was clear to view, a great wall of black rock where sea-hawks nested, and inaccessible to the boldest climber.

To the right the cove seemed to be of fair size from horn to horn, but it was no tranquil spot like the one at the back of the inn. Even on a calm day like the present the Atlantic ground-swell poured in with tremendous force, and was broken with ferocious whirlpools and spray-fountains by toothed rock-ledges a foot or two below the surface. The smallest boat could not have entered Tregeraint Cove and lived there for a moment.

For some reason or other the place affected me most unpleasantly, and it was with a little shudder that I retreated and skirted the fence which guarded the dangerous part of the cliff. When I had passed by this, the path turned at right angles and went inland.

As I turned I saw, perhaps a furlong away, the house of Helzephron.

It lay upon the eastern slope of Carne Zerran, an ancient, grim-looking house of granite, long, low, and of considerable size. A few stunted trees grew round about, and a fairly extensive domain of gardens, as I supposed, surrounded by a high wall.

Using my prism glasses, I could see that this wall was topped by iron spikes. Of course I was considerably below Tregeraint as on the sloping hillside, and it lay quite open to view. Higher up and beyond the house was the derrick, engine-house and sheds of the mine, with

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here and there dumps of débris and various sheds.

Although the wire fences, which I soon made out, went round the whole property, it lay quite open to the view. And when I had passed it and climbed to the table-land of the moor beyond I saw that it would be even more open to the eyes—spread out like a map, in short.

One thing was already certain. There was nothing whatever in the nature of a hangar, no building that could possibly shelter even an ordinary four or five seated biplane, to say nothing of an air cruiser.

I was not disappointed, because I had hardly expected to meet with anything of the kind. The pirate ship, you will remember, was—like all the big long-distance air-ships—a cross between what used to be known in the old days as the "seaplane" and the "flying boat." True, some of our war aeroplanes of quite large size were fitted with floats that could be raised, and wheels for land work in addition.

This might be the case with the pirate. But it was not to be thought of for a moment that a man of Helzephron's intelligence would dare to house his extraordinary ship where any one of my police could have investigated simply by showing his badge of office

The land policeman and the coast-guards of the whole English coast-line had already reported on every hangar and aerodrome in the kingdom. If Helzephron was the man I believed him, I was well aware that we were only at the beginning of the duel.

I mounted up past the wire fences and the mine. I did not dare to use my glasses in passing, for I saw in the distance one or two figures of men strolling about by the engine-house and derrick. But when I was at last among the heather at the top I lay down and took a long survey of the buildings, drawing a careful map in my pocketbook, which might prove of great use later on.

I waited half an hour at the little station of St. Erth and then caught a train to Penzance, arriving at the hotel about tea-time. As I came into the lounge after a wash and brush-up I saw Danjuro sitting in one corner. He had a pile of newspapers round him, and I saw that the London journals had arrived.

He handed me one of them as I sat down. A paragraph among the police news was marked in pencil.

Major Helzephron had been taken to Vine Street Police Station and locked up for the night charged with an aggravated assault on Mr. Wag Ashton at the Mille Colonnes Restaurant, on the evidence of M. Nicholas and the headwaiter.

A medical man had attended the court on behalf of the prosecutor to say that Mr. Ashton was too unwell to appear until the morrow. Upon his promising to attend the court the next day Major Helzephron was admitted to bail.

"That gives us nearly two clear days," said Danjuro. "When Ashton does appear he will not press the case, and will own that he gave provocation; Helzephron will be fined, perhaps let off. I see that honorable Ashton battered him a good deal. And now, your news, Sir John, if you please."

CHAPTER XI

THE AIR WOLVES

HE MADE no comment, and did not interrupt me until I had completely finished, nor did his inscrutable face give any indication of what he thought.

"My own investigations," he said, "can be told in a few words. The small steamship which brings supplies to the cove behind the inn is the private property of Helzephron, and she is a great deal faster and much better engined than most people are aware. She lies at the little port of Hayle, which is on the main line from Plymouth to Penzance, in St. Ives Bay. At certain times large quantities of petrol arrive in separate consignments from different parts of the country. The *Sea Gull* is loaded to her capacity, and then makes the short voyage to Zerran Cove."

"That's the last link," I said. "No one could doubt now."

"There is another, still more interesting, fact. Hayle was once a place of much greater importance than it is at present. There were large foundries and engineering works there in the past. These have been abandoned, owing to the silting-up of the harbor, for many years, as only vessels of small draft can enter easily today.

"But the foundry buildings remain. From time to time a portion of them has been let for this or that small enterprise.

"Three years ago Helzephron rented a part of the works and installed machinery. He had about twenty laborers, but the real work, whatever it was, took place in a large experimental shed, to which no one was admitted but him and his friends. They were already at Zerran, and used to drive over in motors every day.

"It was locally known that some new machinery for Wheal Tregeraint was being made. Many shippings took place from Hayle to Zerran Cove."

"But the ship, the Pirate Ship itself?"

"Who can tell? We go step by step in the dark. Many theories have crossed my mind. I have dismissed them all. I want to approach this, the most sinister problem of all, with a blank mind.

"We can do nothing till we are on the spot. Our preliminary work is over, but the real labor begins."

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"A sinister problem enough," I answered bitterly. "But not the most trouble to me. I tell you, Danjuro, that as I lay among the heather and looked down upon that lonely house, as I thought of the devilish crew that live there, for a moment my heart turned to water, and the agony was more than I could endure. *She* may be there at this moment, defenseless and in the power——"

I could not go on. I covered my face with my hands and was nearer breaking down than ever before. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"It has never left my mind either. Do not give way, for the moment of action has come. We go to the inn at Zerran tonight—within the hour."

"Tonight!"

"Yes. We can not afford to waste a moment. Helzephron is kept in London. One great danger is removed from our path. We shall never have a better opportunity than now.

"In dealing with enemies such as ours we must strike quickly and strongly when they think themselves most secure. Before dawn we must have penetrated the inmost secrets of Tregeraint."

I had by now grown accustomed to regard Danjuro as the leader of our enterprise. His decision was like cool water to a man dying of thirst in a desert. I stood up, absolutely myself.

"There is of course no reason why we should not install ourselves at Zerran tonight instead of tomorrow morning. Trewhella won't mind," I said.

"I will order the car in an hour. Meanwhile I have one or two things to do. Perhaps you will settle the hotel bill, Sir John, and tell the people that we are leaving."

IT WAS a stiflingly hot night as the car climbed up to the moors, and in the glare of our headlights the gorse and heather by the roadside streamed swiftly like some golden cinema, leaving a more sable dark before and behind them. Danjuro, by my side, was lost in thought. The massive head hung upon his chest. About half-way on our journey he said a curious thing.

"This would be an ideal night for another raid in the air-lanes of the Atlantic."

I did not answer, for I also was thinking deeply. So it was for tonight! We crossed swords, fired the first shot, what you will, with our cunning enemy in a few hours. What would they bring forth?

I felt no fear, only a deep resolution not to fail in rescue and the execution of Justice. I was happier than I had been for days, for it is thought that turns the bones to pith and thins the blood, not action. And as we flashed down the dark moor road to where the lights of the solitary inn showed yellow I sent a wordless prayer to the Throne of Justice and Mercy. And as if an answer was truly and instantly vouchsafed there came into my mind these words from the Ninety-First Psalm—

"I will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

And after that I put mere abstract thought away from me.

As we rolled up silently to the inn we heard a great noise of singing from the long room. A tall woman came out of a side door, and I explained that we had decided to come earlier than we had planned. She was a comely, good-humored dame, who made no trouble about our arrival.

Both bedrooms and sitting-rooms were prepared, and when Thumbwood had taken the car round to the barn he went up-stairs to unpack the baggage. Mr. Trewhella appeared from the bar. I introduced Danjuro, and we arranged to have some supper at half-past ten.

Meanwhile the singing continued in great volume, mingled with the twanging chords of a banjo.

"Your guests are merry tonight," said Danjuro.

"It's the gentlemen from the mine sir," said the landlord. "It's one of their nights off, so to speak. Would you like to join 'em for half an hour?"

"I think not on our first night. But they sing very well. As a foreigner I am interested in all English customs; may I take a peep?"

He had gone to the communicating door as he spoke, and, pulling aside a red curtain which covered the upper half of glass, he looked through. I did the same.

The long room was full of people and tobacco-smoke. With a single exception, that of Mr. Vargus, they were all quite young men, ranging, I should say, from three-and-twenty to thirty. Most of them were dressed in old tweed suits, but the material and cut told their own tale, and spoke of the "right" kind of tailor.

At first glance they might have been a collection of naval officers or senior undergraduates but only at first glance. My eyes roved from face to face, and on each I saw the loss of innocence and honor. Some were cunning; others had a brutality in ill accord with their youth, and there was a hard bravado in the eyes of all.

It was sickening. One felt that one had suddenly looked upon something that should remain hidden. In that haze of smoke lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and evil in the universe.

I almost wanted to spit upon the floor in an uncontrollable gesture of repudiation. As I turned I saw the landlord looking at me.

"A promising lot of young devils," said I.

"You do see it too, zur?" he replied, and then Danjuro touched my arm, and I turned to look again.

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A man without a hat had just entered the room from the outside. He sat in a chair which he had obviously occupied before, for he was in naval uniform, and his cap was lying there. He was a big, foolish-looking fellow, far gone in drink, but despite that his face was the only wholesome one there.

"Who is that?" I whispered to Trewhella as Mr. Vargus poured a generous allowance of rum into the newcomer's glass.

"That's Billy Pengelly, our coast-guard. The gentlemen do make a lot of him, and he's none the better for't, for Billy's one as likes his drop. Still he goes and sleeps it off, and he belongs to be strong as a bull. And in these lone parts there's not often any one to see if he's on the watch or not."

A tall boy with a banjo took up his instrument and twanged the chords.

"Now, gentlemen!" he shouted in a clear, fresh tenor. "A chorus!"

And without further preliminary he dashed into nothing less than the "Pirates' Chanty" from "Treasure Island:"

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest!
Yo, ho! And a bottle of rum!

The inn rocked with the volume of sound. I stood there fascinated with a sort of horror. The thing—knowing what I knew—was so daring and grim that more than anything else it showed me with whom we had to deal.

The application was lost upon Danjuro, but I told him what it meant in French, and he nodded with contracted eyes.

Drink and the devil had done for the rest
Yo, ho! And a bottle of rum!

One would have thought that the room could not contain the noise, and that the very windows must be shattered, and in the very middle of it I heard something else—the urgent, throbbing sound of an engine.

Danjuro heard it as soon as I did.

"Motor-bicycle," he whispered.

The sound grew insistent. Whoever was coming rode —— for leather and with the exhaust open. Then there was a succession of reports, a grinding noise, and the door of the bar was flung suddenly open.

A TALL man in goggles and overalls covered with dust walked in. As he did so the pirate chant stopped with dramatic suddenness, and the singers jumped to their feet. Then he removed his glasses and his cap.

It was Major Helzephron.

They clustered round him thickly, and to each one he said a quiet word. In every case when this happened the man spoken to nodded and vanished into the night. I could hear them running outside the inn. Lastly Helzephron took Vargus by the arm, and they also passed out.

I could see the man more plainly than ever before. There was a great bruise round about the left eye, and the face was pale. But it blazed with will and purpose, and the cruel mouth was set in a malicious and abominable smile.

"The wolves are hunting tonight," Danjuro said to me two minutes later in my bedroom, and once again his face was like a demon of Old Japan. "Helzephron will not appear at the police court tomorrow. He has arranged it somehow, and after all it is a trivial affair. He has ridden down from London during the day."

"You mean that there is going to be a raid tonight?"

"I feel sure of it. Why else should Helzephron rush from London? And you observed the manner of his confederates. Don't you see this—with all his cunning precautions the pirate is far too clever not to know that his career must be a short one? He can not hope to remain concealed for any great length of time.

"His object is to obtain an immense fortune quickly. Already I calculate he has stolen jewels and money to the value of two hundred thousand pounds. A few more such coups and he can disband his crew and disappear for ever. Speed is the essence of his plan."

"But we must do something; we must stop it."

"Our opportunity for action is improved, Sir John. In the first place you must take steps to concentrate a fleet of patrol ships in this neighborhood."

"The car is here. I can write official telegrams in code to Plymouth and London. Within an hour the *hinterland* and the sea from here to Scilly can be covered with a swarm of ships. St. Ives is only six miles away."

"Write the dispatches at once. I will call Thumbwood, who must take them in, together with an official note from you to the postmaster."

I unlocked my portfolio and wrote the wires. There should be such an invasion of the air tonight as Far West Cornwall had never known!

Thumbwood appeared. I gave him full instructions and heard the Rolls-Royce start below.

"And now, our part!" I said to Danjuro.

"If we are right in our conjecture," he replied, "the pirates will shortly leave Tregeraint on their expedition. How they will join the airship or where we don't know. But we may safely assume that the house will be left in charge of one or at most two men. The others will all be wanted to man the ship; it is a simple calculation.

"Here is your chance. You must get inside Tregeraint, obtain conclusive evidence and if the poor lady is there alive bring her away in

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safety. Perhaps tonight the Pirate Ship will make its last cruise! Our presence here, our identity, is quite unsuspected. A concentration of hostile air-ships in this neighborhood is the last thing Helzephron will expect tonight."

"And you, my friend?" I asked.

"I would that I could come with you, for you go in danger of your life; but as I see it my work should be different. Some one in view of its escape must solve the mystery of the Pirate Ship itself. I have a theory already; I must put it to proof. There are boats in the cove below—I see that the moon is rising, I know what I must do. But, even so, I will come with you, Sir John, if you say so."

I shook my head.

"No, I will go alone," I told him. "It is my job."

Then Danjuro did a strange thing. He took my hand, bowed over it and kissed it.

"You also are of the *samurai*," he said.

In a minute more he carried in a heavy bag from his own bedroom and produced from it a miscellany of objects.

"Here is a twelve-shot automatic with a dozen cartridge-clips," he said. "You know all about the working of it? I thought so. This pair of wire-cutters you will need for the barbed fence. These two keys with adjustable wards—you turn the milled screw at the end to adjust them—will open any ordinary lock. Here also is an extremely powerful steel lever with a wedge end. In the hands of a strong man like yourself it will wrench open most windows or doors."

HEAVEN knows there was no lightness in my heart, but in the usual English way at serious moments I laughed.

"The Complete Burglar!" I said.

Danjuro looked at me with a glance as cold as ice.

"I am in most deadly earnest, Sir John. You know what my experience has been. Well, I say deliberately that I have never been in such peril as you are going into."

"I meant nothing. And what is this?"

I had taken up a little leather tube with a lens at one end.

"A powerful electric torch. But it is more than that. You can instantly reverse it in your hand, and if you press this stud the plated bottom flies open and by means of a spring an ounce of cayenne pepper is projected for several yards. It will stop any one and operates instantaneously. A little thing I invented and have found most useful.

"These handcuffs are of papier mâché and weigh practically nothing. They are from Japan and tough as the hardest steel. You may require them.

"And I never go on an expedition without this tiny bottle of chloroform and pad. You can stow everything about you with ease, and the combined weight is as nothing."

I did so, and it was as he said. Then a thought struck me.

"Armed and prepared like this, I feel certain that I shall get in. But there are two Tibetan mastiffs let loose in the grounds at night. I can shoot them, but the noise of the report——"

"That is provided for, Sir John. You see this gun?"

"It looks like a short-barreled rook-rifle except for the great thickness at the breech."

"It holds ten conical bullets. They are hollow-nosed and expand on impact. The point is that the gun is perfectly noiseless. Powder is not used at all. The propelling power is liquefied carbonic-acid gas, and all that is heard at the moment of firing is a sharp snap. With this you can stalk the dogs and kill them easily enough.

"Do not forget your hunting-flask and brandy and water. And for concentrated food, should you be detained in hiding—though I and Thumbwood will be coming to look after you if you don't appear by morning—these solid chocolate cakes are invaluable."

All this was done quickly and with the most business-like precision. Although my sense of humor told me that I was like the *White Knight* in "Alice in Wonderland" I did realize that I should be a terribly nasty customer to tackle, and I was grateful.

While we had been talking there came sounds from below of the closing of the inn, and shortly after we were called to supper.

"Don't you stay up any longer, Mr. Trewhella," I said. "You must want your rest. As for us, we are late birds. Both I and my friend sometimes take a five minutes' stroll last thing before we turn in. That won't inconvenience you?"

"Bless your life, no zur. You do as you're a mind here. 'Tesn't like a town. The key of the front door hangs on a nail by the side. And if you should be going out later, Billy Pengelly's in the empty pigsty a-sleeping off what he's had, and there's a bucket of cold water on the wall. In half an hour's time or so I know as he'd be grateful for having it poured over 'em!"

We promised to perform what was evidently one of the amenities of this primitive place and Mr. Trewhella withdrew.

"That coast-guard may be useful to me," Danjuro said. "And now, Sir John, I don't want to hurry you, but my advice is that you start. I don't suppose that the band had left Tregeraint yet. But there are a hundred hiding-places on the moor all round the domain, and you may be able to see which way they go before you make your own attempt. I shall be on the trail in a very few minutes after you."

"And Charles? He will be back shortly."

"I shall need him. I know he would wish

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to be with you, Sir John, but I believe your chances are better alone. I shall not leave until he returns, provided he is not unduly detained."

He went to the window and pulled aside the curtain. "A waning moon," he said, "which will be at full power about midnight, when there may be such a battle in the air as the world will hear with wonder."

I saw to my gear. It fitted about me very comfortably.

"Well, good night," I said, and without further words I went quietly out of the house.

When I got a hundred yards away I turned and looked at it, all silvered in the moon. The air was sweet with the perfume of shy moorland flowers that give up all their treasure to the night. The Atlantic, far below, made a sound like fairy dreams, and on the distant slopes of Carne Zerran an owl sounded his melancholy oboe note.

CHAPTER XII

MICHAEL FIDDON

THE moon was in its last quarter and shed a faint spectral light over the moor as I came quietly up to the first of the barbed-wire fences that surrounded Tregeraint. I lay down in the heath, certain that I was quite invisible, and waited.

An hour had hardly elapsed since the band had left "The Miners' Arms." Were they still here, or had they set out for their unknown destination? I could not hear a sound of any kind. From where I lay the high wall hid the house, and among the mine buildings higher up there was neither light nor movement. Tregeraint might have been deserted for a hundred years, and the roaring company of the inn had vanished into thin air. And strain my eyes as I would, there was no sign of the great Tibetan dogs.

I remained motionless for a quarter of an hour by the illuminated dial of my watch. Then, as nothing happened, I began operations. The wire was tough and intricate, but ten minutes' work with Danjuro's powerful cutters disposed of it sufficiently for me to crawl through both the first and second fence without a scratch.

I stood now in the lower portion of a large, oblong paddock of short grass, all gray in the moon. The surrounding wall of the manor was about a hundred yards up the slope, and with the gas rifle on my arm I glided over the intervening space like a ghost. My boots were soled with india-rubber and I made no sound at all.

I found the wall to be ten or eleven feet high. It was crowned with a cheveaux-de-frise of iron spikes, and, owing to its height and smooth surface, quite insurmountable. But I knew there must be an entrance somewhere, and never expected to climb the barrier, so I began a cautious circuit.

About half-way round the extent I came to a wooden door set in the wall. It was a mere postern, not more than five feet high, and had a barred grille in the center of about a foot square. I reflected that this must be a side or garden exit, and that the main gate was probably on the other side, facing the mine-head. But it was all the better for my purpose if this was so, and I took out my steel "jimmy" and prepared to tackle it.

My intention was to prise it open with my tool, for I am a very powerful man, but suddenly another idea occurred to me. The bars of the grille were old and rusted. As there was no key-hole in the door it was obviously secured by bolts. I inserted my lever, and without putting out my full strength, and with little more sound than is made by the striking of a match, soon had three of the bars out of the wood and lying on the grass.

My arms are long. I pushed my right through and my fingers after a little groping caught the handle of the bolt, which slid back easily enough. It had been oiled, showing that the door, which swung back at once, was in constant use.

I stepped within, treading like a cat, and closed the door behind me. I stood in a large and neglected garden, where shrubs and flowers grew as they would and formed a miniature jungle, through which I could see the dark façade of the house, now quite close. Everything was as still as death, and I listened with strained attention for several minutes.

So far the work had been ridiculously easy, but as I crept up a moss-grown path toward the building every nerve was on the alert. I was not afraid—I think I can truly say so—but there was a chill on my soul. This old house, with its atmosphere of robbery and murder, its singular and formidable inhabitants, the unknown dangers of the approach, and above all the thought that Connie might be within it, all combined to wrap me in a terrible gloom of the spirit. Yet, looking back, I see that this was well. It hardened all my resolution and made me terrible.

I had no thought of it then, but now I can see the grim horror of such a being as I had become approaching the house step by step.

All the lower windows were shuttered. There was not a gleam of light anywhere as I followed the path and came to the front, where there was a grass-grown gravel sweep and iron gates in the wall. This part of the house was plain and unadorned save for a pillared porch and steps leading down to the drive.

A thick growth of ivy covered it from the ground to the first floor windows, and after I had gently tried the heavy front door, which as I expected was locked, this ivy suggested

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a mode of entrance. If I could climb up and get on to the roof of the porch it might be possible to force the central bedroom window, which I could see was unshuttered.

The ivy was of ancient growth, the stems thick and tough. Any schoolboy could have mounted to the top of the porch. And any boy could have pushed back the catch of the window with the blade of his pocket-knife, opened it and stepped inside.

I STOOD in a bedroom, dark except for a little pool of moonlight by the window. I felt curtains, and I drew them before I switched on my torch. It was an ordinary bedroom, very untidy, furnished with a suite of painted deal. There was, however, a great saucer-bath full of water, and a pair of Indian clubs.

The wall was hung with photographs of football teams, and in an open drawer of the little dressing-table was a pile of gold and notes.

Commonplace enough, like an undergraduate's room at Oxford, but nevertheless it affected me unpleasantly. It was like a sudden intimacy with something abominable as I opened the door inch by inch and felt for the powerful pistol in my pocket. My heart hung poised for an instant as I stepped out into a dark corridor, and then I gave a gasp, and my heart almost stopped beating.

I stood at the head of broad, shallow stairs. Below was a large hall dimly lit, and pouring up to me in a volume of sound came the melodious thunder of a piano played by a master hand.

At first my knees grew weak, and I clutched the shadowy banisters to save me from falling. Constance! Who could be playing in this evil house but she? I can never forget the agonized pang of mingled joy and horror that I felt.

But as I crouched and listened the fierce emotion passed away. Whoever was playing it was not my girl. A lost soul made that music.

I glided down the stairs. Certainly the wolves had left their lair, though in what manner I could not divine. The house was inhabited by but one or two people at most.

All the doors along the corridor stood open as if the rooms had been left in a hurry. The building *felt* deserted, empty of its usual inhabitants.

A dim light came from an open door at the right of the hall. I peeped in and saw a long, shadowy room of great size. The walls were paneled and hung here and there with pictures, the floor carpeted.

Two immense oak tables with their complement of chairs went up and down the center, and it hardly needed a butler's hatch in the wall, doubtless communicating with the kitchen, to tell me that this was the dining-room of Helzephron and his buccaneers.

At the far end, and opposite the entrance door, was a wide and lofty archway half-covered by a curtain. It led to another room beyond, and it was from this that a bright light streamed, and the sound of music came.

I placed my gas rifle on the floor by the wall, took our my automatic, unlocking the safety catch, and went to the curtain on tiptoe. There was an alcove at the side, where some shelves had been, and this was perfectly dark. I marked it as a possible hiding-place, and then pulled the curtain aside for half an inch. Just as I did so there was a clash of prelude, and the pianist began the enchanted "Third Ballade" of Chopin.

It was the man known to me as Vargus, the man with the smooth voice, the face that was evil and refined. He sat at a magnificent grand piano, swaying a little on his stool.

Do you know that marvelous composition of Chopin's? Most people have heard it at least once or twice in their lives, played by some *maestro*. I have heard the renderings of the great pianists of the world, but none played as this man played.

A terrible remorse informed the unearthly music. It was as if the player strained with every power of his being to recapture something irrevocably lost.

When he came to that strange passage which has been so often compared to the soft cantering of a horse the pain in the lovely chords was unbearable. The artist, Aubrey Beardsley, made a wonderful drawing of this passage—a spectral white charger ambling through a dark wood of pines, bearing a lady in a cloak of black velvet. The picture rose before my eyes as I stood, but it flashed away, and words of awful significance took its place in my mind and fitted themselves to the closing chords.

Night and day he was among the tombs, and on the hills, crying out and beating himself with stones.

As you may know, the piece ends in a furious welter of sound. It had just concluded, and the player sat motionless as a wax doll, when another figure heaved itself into my line of vision, a burly giant with red hair and a heavy, sullen face.

"NOW you've finished that —— row," he growled, "we'd better be moving. We may get signals coming through soon. And I suppose I must feed the canaries!"

I knew the man at once. There was no possibility of mistake. It was Michael Feddon, the famous Rugby international, and six years ago the idol of the public. It was said that he was the finest back that England had ever seen. In the height of his career he had been mixed up in a horrible, criminal scandal and received five years' penal servitude.

I swallowed in my throat with loathing, but

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the next words drove all thought of Feddon's career from my mind.

"Everything is ready on a tray in the kitchen, and the soup is on the electric stove. It will be hot by now," said Vargus in his soft, creamy voice.

"I'll get it, and I wish the —— business was over. I said from the first that when the chief brought those two women here we ran more risk than ever before. It'll turn out badly yet. Mark my words, Vargus."

Vargus took up a bottle which stood on a table by the piano. It was brandy, and he poured out two glasses half full, adding soda from a siphon.

"Here's luck; not a bit of it," he said. "If all goes well tonight a couple more expeditions will see us finished with a hundred thousand each and scattered all over the globe. We all have our fancies. The chief's is this Shepherd girl. Well, in another fortnight he'll disappear with her. Every man to his taste."

Feddon swallowed his brandy at a gulp.

"She'll lead him a dance yet!" he said. "I never saw such a spit-fire. I hate going near her, and I wish it wasn't my turn to stay at home. I'd tame her though if she were mine. I wouldn't stand her pretty ways and the things she says, like the chief does. He's mad about the girl."

"And what would you do, my beefy friend?" said Vargus with his abominable smile.

Feddon touched his middle. He was wearing a leather belt.

"Take this to her," he said, "and beat her black and blue."

Vargus rose, grinning.

"Well, get the food," he said. "I'll go down at once. You'll find me in the wireless cabin."

Feddon lurched forward. I had just time to press myself into the alcove when he came through the curtain and strode heavily through the room into the hall.

Vargus went to a tall mirror by the piano as I watched him breathlessly. He did something that I could not see, and it swung open like a door. There was the snap of an electric switch and I saw him step into a lift, pull a rope and sink out of sight, leaving the door open.

He could not have sunk ten feet when I was in the room. It was large and square, furnished with something like luxury and brilliantly lit with electric globes.

There was an armchair in full view of the archway. I sat down, and it was still warm from its last occupant. That seemed to me amusing, and I smiled.

Something clanked, a soft swishing noise changed to a distant rumble, and the lift came into sight. I had it covered, but it was empty —waiting for the man who was going to "feed the canaries."

I waited for him, too. There was a box of cigarets close by. I lit one and smoked quietly. Then I heard him coming through the dining-room, his footsteps and the rattle of a tray.

The half-drawn curtain bellied out and was pushed aside. Feddon stood there with the tray in his hands and the light shining on his ugly red hair.

He saw me. His mouth opened and his eyes started out. He seemed unutterably foolish, like a great clod, and I laughed aloud.

But he was quick; oh, quick and clever! Like the famous footballer that he was! In a second he had ducked, and the loaded tray was skimming across the room straight at my head as he hurled himself after it, quick as a snake strikes.

I was ready, though. He was not. My first shot broke his shoulder and stopped him for an instant.

Then with a roar of pain and fury he came on again, and I shot him through the heart when he was three feet away.

Mr. Feddon would feed no more canaries.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECRET THAT PUZZLED TWO CONTINENTS

I STOOD looking down at Michael Feddon's body. I was stunned. For the man I had just killed I cared nothing, felt no emotion. I had saved him from the drop; that was all. But, though I had been convinced that Danjuro's and my own suspicions were absolute fact, the full realization had come so suddenly that it clouded the mind.

Constance *was* here, and she was unharmed!

I had indeed penetrated into the very center of this lair of the air wolves, and already had enough evidence to hang the lot. For a minute the mingled joy and relief were so great that I could not grasp them.

The brandy-bottle of Mr. Vargus was still on the side table. I stepped over the body—the leather belt which he had proposed as an instrument of correction for Constance was in full view—and helped myself sparingly. Almost immediately my brain cleared.

I listened intently. The two shots from my automatic had alarmed no one. The sinister house was as silent as before. It seemed quite certain that Feddon and Vargus alone remained to guard it. Even the two Tibetan mastiffs of which I had heard so much had disappeared.

To my right the tall mirror swung on its hinges, and the lift beyond was lit by a globe in the roof. To what it led I did not know, probably some cellar where poor Constance and her maid were imprisoned, though a lift seemed superfluous.

At any rate Vargus—the next person to tackle—was down there, and it was long odds

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that I could not get the better of him. Moreover, and this was in my favor, he was expecting Feddon, and the arrival of the lift would not startle him at first if he were close by.

I examined the lift. It was electrically operated and of a type perfectly familiar to me, fitted with an automatic magnetic brake. I saw that it traveled from its secret recess behind the mirror to one other spot only, stopping nowhere on the way. A touch of the rope started it, and it would stop itself when its journey was done.

Well, there was no use waiting. Again I must plunge into the unknown. Connie was waiting! I wondered how honorable Danjuro was getting on, and laid myself long odds that he wasn't having such an exciting time as I was! How he would stare if he came back to "The Miners' Arms" in a few hours and found me there with Connie, and the artistic Mr. Vargus cooling down in the patent papier mâché hand-cuffs from Japan!

Mr. Trewhella of the inn had shown me a large pig, which he called "Gladys," and of which he was fond. There was a vacant and stoutly built sty next door, which would be an excellent place of confinement for the interpreter of Chopin!

Yes, I thought these thoughts even at that moment. I was madly exhilarated. Everything had gone so easily and well. I stepped into the lift humming a song. It was the old chantey that the pirates had roared in the inn two short hours ago—

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest.

There was a looking-glass on one side of the lift—probably the thing had been bought entire at some sale—and I saw myself in it. The song died away. Whose was this grim and terrible face, gashed with deep lines, with eyes that smoldered with a red light? Mine?

I have told you how Danjuro looked when the bloodhound that he was emerged for an instant from behind the bland Oriental mask. There was not a pin to choose between us.

The lift sank slowly. Every second I expected the soft jerk of its stopping. But the seconds went on. Down and down; what cellar was it that lay so low? Were we dropping to the center of the earth?

It seemed an age before the motion slowed, and I had already obtained an inkling of the truth when a dim archway rose up before me and the machine came to rest.

This was no cellar. I was deep down in Tregeraint Mine, which must run under the house itself. In the necessity for fox-like caution I did not follow out the thought—not yet. But I believe that the subsconscious brain had already seen far into the mystery.

I STEPPED out in a mine cutting. The walls were cut in the rock, and the roof here and there was shored up with heavy timber-props. It was wide enough for two men to walk abreast, and quite eight feet high.

Every fifteen yards or so hung a roughly wired electric lamp, and the floor was beaten hard by the passage of many feet. The air was hot and stagnant.

I prowled down this passage without a sound, my pistol in my hand, ready to shoot at sight, but for what seemed an interminable time I met no one and saw nothing but the damp walls, here and there sparkling with yellow pyrites and the green of copper.

There came at length a rough wooden door which swung easily open, and beyond a much narrower and higher passage than before, a more natural cleft in the immemorial rock it seemed, owing nothing to the agency of human hands. It dripped with water.

Hitherto I had been walking on a level; now I trod a fairly steep descent, while the path was no longer straight, but full of fantastic twistings. Each moment the air grew cooler, and each moment a deep murmurous noise, like very faint and muffled drums, grew louder.

The lights, now suspended from a thick and tarry cable, were less frequent than at first, and the place was full of shadows. But as for the noise, that could only be one thing—the Atlantic ground-swell. I was approaching the sea, doubtless by one of the old mine "adits," made for ventilation many years ago and long before the invention of the electric fan.

The narrow way ended in a door. It was latched but not locked, and I pushed it slowly open. Immediately there was a sense of vast and gloomy space. I say gloomy, for it was not absolutely dark. Here and there hung dim, yellow lights.

Advancing a step or two upon a floor of hard earth or sand, I found myself in a vast cavern. It seemed as large as the shell of a cathedral, and for organ there was the plagent, echoing sound of sea-waves. The sound came from my right, and was carried on a current of sweet, brine-laden air. Peering through the darkness, I seemed to be aware of a faint ghostly radiance a considerable distance away.

I had lost the capacity of amazement, but not for quick thinking. In a lightning flash of realization I knew that I had penetrated to the heart of Helzephron's secret, even before my thoughts arranged themselves in sequence. And then as near as possible coincident with my stepping through the door, I heard a shout.

Some one had seen me.

The shout came from the other side of the long, aisle-shaped cave. Simultaneously, halfway up the side at a height of thirty feet from the floor, there was a sudden illumination. I

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saw a broad ledge in the wall, railed round, with a ladder staircase descending from it.

A little black figure was leaning over the rail, and it was from this that the shouting came. It did not need his words to tell me that here was a wireless station. I could see the drum and the battery-shelf quite distinctly.

"A signal!" he shouted, and I knew that he took me for the dead man above. "They're coming back! The sky swarms with armed patrols and war-ships. They've had to run for it, but the chief thinks he's shaken them off. I must switch on the guides."

I gave an answering shout, keying my voice down to something like Feddon's bass growl.

"It's C. Q. D.!—C. Q. D.!" came in a shrill voice of alarm, and Mr. Vargus ran down the ladder like an ape.

C. Q. D. The signal of "extreme danger." Well, I rather thought it was!

Where I stood I was in deep shadow, and my face could not possibly be seen. I was of much the same height and build as the dead man, so Vargus ran down the cave without the least suspicion. He had gone to his left, my right, to where I had already seen a pale light, and I followed him more slowly at a distance of some ten yards. It was a natural instinct enough.

My only idea was to silence him, find Constance and fly from the horrible place. I could not know that I was making a fatal mistake.

I was running forward into complete understanding. The great cave turned a little to the right. It opened out every second until at length I saw the mouth, wide as that of the largest-sized hangar on an aerodrome, flooded with moonlight.

Opposite, sixty yards away, was a precipitous wall of black rock; between it and the mouth of the cave a terrible chasm, which fell sheer to the water. It was all clear now. Far above on the top of the cliffs was that fenced-in part with the "dangerous" notice boards.

You will remember that I had lain down by the side of this fence and peered downward. I had looked into the same gulf that I was now looking into from a much lower altitude. And the rock there overhung so greatly that there was no possible indication of the cave-mouth where I now stood.

Moreover the cave itself turned inward from the sea, running parallel to the cliff. From the sea, as from the land, the opening of the cave was entirely hidden.

VARGUS was fumbling at a switchboard. He pulled down a vulcanite handle; there was a green spark, and lights at the top, bottom and sides of the entrance glowed out brightly.

Imagine an illuminated rabbit-hole in the side of a railway embankment, and you have an exact miniature of what this vast secret cave had now become. Go a little further and think of a bat whose lair was in this hole, and was guided to it by the lights.

Vargus snapped another and smaller switch. I watched him with a sense of complete detachment. I knew as well as if I had been told that he was lighting guiding lamps somewhere on the two headlands that guarded the entrance to the cave outside. No thought of danger came to me; I think joy at this complete discovery and wonder at the stupendous cunning and achievement of it all were my only emotions.

"They may be here at any moment, Feddon. I tell you I don't like it at all. I told the chief that it was madness not to lie low for a bit. But you know what he is. The Government has got the tip somehow; the Cornish seas are humming with enemies. That fellow Custance is smart as they make them."

He was moving toward me as these words came from him in a nervous, disjointed stream. Then he saw me and stopped bang in the middle of a sentence.

It was my moment.

"How do you do, Mr. Vargus?" I said. "You mentioned my name. Indeed, you paid me a compliment for which I thank you. I thought I'd drop in for a chat. Sorry to find Major Helzephron out."

I never saw a man in such deadly fear. His face went the color of cheese, and a horrible choking noise began in his throat. He staggered to within a yard of the brink; another step and he would have plunged into the abyss.

"You, you, *you!*" he said, the last word in a dreadful whisper.

"The Oxford professor—yes. Mr. Vargus, I am a lover of music, and you have entertained me royally tonight. But you have played Chopin for the last time in this world."

I lifted the pistol and covered his heart. His yellow mask quivered and was still.

"Quickly, please," he said, and there was even a faint smile of relief about his pallid lips.

He could face death gladly, and I knew why. To have shot him there and cast his body to the void would be a mercy. I had other uses for Mr. Vargus.

My pistol hand was steady as a rock. With the left I took out Danjuro's handcuffs and walked up to him.

"Not yet," I said when I was within a foot.

He saw what I meant. As comprehension leaped into his eyes he tried to step back. He nearly did it, but I was just too quick for him. I caught his ankle with the crook of my right foot, and he crashed on his back with his head and shoulders actually over the chasm. Before he could move again I had jerked him backward by the legs and had him handcuffed.

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I pulled him to his feet by his collar and half-marched, half-carried him back into the cave. He was nothing more than a bundle of clothes in my hands.

"Now," I said, "take me at once to the place where Miss Shepherd is confined, and, though I make no promises, it may go less hardly with you than the rest."

He twisted his head and tried to look me in the face.

"If I do, will you shoot me?" he whispered, fawning on me like a beaten dog. "For ——'s sake shoot me or give me an opportunity to shoot myself."

"The hangman will save you the trouble," I answered brutally. "Now then, march!"

He gave a great wail of despair.

"Ah, you don't know what I was once!" he cried, and there was such a horror of remorse, a damnation so profound in that cry of agony, that a fiend would have been moved.

"I heard you play the 'Third Ballade,' " I answered, and my voice was no longer firm.

"Death, please; death."

"Take me quickly to Miss Shepherd. Then perhaps— I can't kill you myself, but——"

It was as if my words poured a new life into his veins. His knees still knocked together in a loathsome paralysis, but he made effort to shamble forward.

CHAPTER XIV

SURPRIZE

VARGUS was silent now. Our feet made no noise upon the sandy floor of the cave. It was then that I heard something like a cat purring.

Unconsciously I stopped to listen. No, it wasn't a cat, it was the faint drone of some night beetle; it was——

On the right wall of the cavern—remember that my back was turned to its mouth and the sea—there was a sudden flash of white light.

The rest happened in five seconds.

The light leaped out from the wall, and instantaneously the vast vaulted place was brilliantly illuminated. I had a fleeting vision of wooden galleries, a workshop and smithy, piles of stores, and then I wheeled round with a shout of terror.

The drone had leaped up to a deep, menacing note, like the E string of a double bass. A circular furnace of white light in the center of a gigantic shadow rushed at me with incredible speed.

A blast of wind struck me like the shell from a six-inch gun; the drone rose to the echoing shout of an army as the Pirate Air-Ship entered the cave that was its home.

I had just the millionth part a of second in which to realize the truth before my head struck; the wind seemed to tear out my very vitals, and I knew nothing more.

ONCE when I was a boy at the seaside in Wales I dived into a deep rock-pool and, deceived by the clearness of the water, hit my head against a submerged ledge and for several seconds was stunned. There was no one with me, but fortunately I recovered in time, and with bursting lungs regained the surface.

The experience was repeated now, or so it seemed, with a curious subconscious memory. I thought that I was rushing violently upward toward the light out of a well of darkness. Each moment the radiance increased and my speed grew greater. There was a sound as of many waters in my ears.

I opened my eyes. The light was brilliant, painful. Also it moved and flashed, and so it was not the sun of twenty years before beating down.

Some one spoke:

"Yes, it's the man himself. He's shaved off his mustache, and his hair and skin are dyed. He's a fair chap really. Look at his lower neck and chest. It's Sir John Custance right enough."

I lay and listened. Although I heard every word and perceived that an electric torch was dancing about, the conversation hardly seemed to concern me.

There was another voice—

"Vargus said he admitted it, but Vargus has fainted again."

Hands felt me all over. Things were taken from my pockets, and there were sharp exclamations of surprize. Somebody gave a long, low whistle.

"No bones broken. His eyes are opening. Give me that flask, Gascoigne."

Some one poured brandy down my throat—I knew it was brandy—and I moved my limbs and groaned.

Then I heard a shout as a door that I could not see was burst open.

"Feddon's killed!" came in a high, excited voice. "Poor old Feddy's shot through the heart."

I think it was at this precise moment that I regained full consciousness and realized that I was not badly hurt. My whole body felt as if it had been severely beaten, but instinct told me that there was no real damage. As for the shock, it was not until several hours afterward that I felt its effect, though then it meant collapse.

I lay perfectly still, this time by design, and closed my eyes. Everything had come back to me; I remembered every incident from the moment I had cut the barbed wire to that when I had escaped, by a miracle, death from the returning Pirate Ship.

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My first thought was one of bitter disappointment. So they had run the gantlet, after all! The mystery ship had escaped the swarm of cruisers and patrol boats that were looking for her. I believe I ground my teeth with rage.

A second afterward I groaned out loud. The sound was wrung from my very heart. I was too late to rescue Constance now.

All round me there was a buzz of low-pitched voices. Without any trouble at all I could detect the note of fear and consternation. And it was tonic. My plight seemed desperate enough, but there was a chance yet. They had taken my weapons from me, but others might prove as valuable. The pirates were disorganized, alarmed.

Well, craft should meet craft! Surely the moment was favorable.

I was in a dimly lit place surrounded by dark figures. How long I lay thus I do not know, probably for no great space of time. At any rate I had not been in full possession of my faculties for many minutes when a door opened and a voice spoke in accents of authority.

It was a voice that I had never heard before, but I knew whose it was.

"I have made a careful examination of the house," came in clear, well-bred tones, "and there is no one there. It is the same outside and all round the fence. I let the dogs loose and they discovered nothing."

"How did this—" I was kicked brutally in the side—"get in, chief?" asked a voice.

"Cut the fence wire and managed to open the door in the east wall. Then climbed the porch and entered through Feddon's bedroom. The dogs followed the scent and showed. That doesn't matter much now. The point is that he's here."

"And we know what to deduce from that," I heard, and pricked up my ears.

My friend Mr. Vargus had revived then! There was a soft malignancy in his voice that made me shudder.

"Vargus is right. It is fairly certain that the game's up as far as this place is concerned. They've marked us down sure enough. In a few minutes I shall take steps to find out exactly how much they do know.

"Meanwhile we appear to have some time before us, and we must carry out the emergency plan that we've so often rehearsed. Gascoigne, Jones and Sutton, Pointz, fill all the petrol-tanks to full capacity, load emergency stores, examine and reverse ship. When finished report to me in my room."

The men hurried away.

"Philips and Minver, get on to the moor and report any man or body of men advancing on the house. You will take rifles and act as outposts. At any sign of approach don't hesitate to fire. Then fall back on the house."

"Shall we take the dogs, chief? They would be useful."

"No, I shall need them. The rest of you will hold the house till the last moment. Then get into the lift and come down. It will take them some time to find out the way and follow, while one man can hold the passages for any length of time. We shall all be fifty miles out at sea before any one can break in down here, and all the swag is packed ready to go on board.

"Vargus, you will stay down here and help me in what I've got to do."

Several other men left the room.

In a lower voice, though I heard every word, Helzephron went on talking to his lieutenant.

"MIND you, I don't actually expect an attack in force, but we must be prepared. For all we know there may be a hundred men waiting on the moor.

"One thing is certain. They know where or whereabouts we are, or that gentleman on the floor would not have got in, nor all those ships be cruising about outside. So we must be off with all we can take to our emergency base in the Hebrides.

"Once outside nothing can touch us of course, and we'd get up to sixteen thousand feet at once. Barometer readings make it pretty certain that it will be cloudy at dawn, and it's a million chances to one against our even being seen."

I lay not three yards away. I had not noticed it until now, but my ankles were tied together, and, weak as I was, any physical effort was impossible.

Helzephron had talked over his plans with an absolute disregard of my presence. He may or may not have known that I was conscious; quite obviously he didn't care twopence one way or the other. And that meant one thing and one thing only.

Before the Pirate Ship fled from its lair for the last time John Custance would have ceased to exist in the body.

"Now for Sir John. How do you feel, Vargus? You look a nasty toss, and it's —— lucky for you we turned up when we did! Do you feel strong enough to drag Sir John into my room? If so I'll go ahead and turn on the lights."

"I'm quite strong enough for that," said Mr. Vargus with a nasty laugh, and in a few seconds he had me by the heels and was towing me like a log over an uneven floor. It was only by stiffening the muscles of my neck till they cracked that I could keep my head from bruising badly.

Then a cloth of some sort was dropped on my face and tied round my head. I felt myself carried for a yard or two, put into a chair with an upright back and then lashed securely to it by strong cords.

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"I'll call you when I want you again," said the voice of Helzephron. "Go and help the others load the ship. And remember that we must take every round of ammunition we can stow in her. Twenty-four hours' rations will be ample. We can renew those at any time. Shells are quite another matter. Sacrifice everything to them."

A door closed. I heard the creak of a chair as Helzephron sat down. There was a long silence, and through the cloth I could feel that he was watching me.

The duel to the death began. I was as a naked man before another with a sword. I braced every nerve and stiffened my will.

"You are in a very unpleasant predicament, Sir John Custance."

The voice was passionless, even a little weary.

"I think it's mutual, Mr. Helzephron," was my answer, and I put an accent on the "Mister." He should have no honorable military title from me.

"Well, that is possible. Indeed, I admit that you have seriously deranged my plans. But the trumps are mine after all. With your intelligence you must be aware that you have a very short time to live."

"I don't doubt that, but I dispute your estimate of your hand."

"May I ask why?"

"With pleasure. I don't care twopence about my own life in comparison with my duty to society. You care a good deal for yours, and you also have a short time in front of you. If it is any satisfaction to you to know, you're in a net from which even the particular minor devils that preside over thieves can't free you."

Thus I lied bravely. A good deal, I thought, might depend on my ability to get the scoundrel into a furious rage, and anyway it was a delight to insult him.

A sharp breath told me that I had drawn blood.

"You use dangerous language, Sir John. You'll be sorry if you go on."

"Now, look here," I rapped out in the tone I should have used to an impudent office boy, "please understand that you can't frighten me. I know that bounders of your type don't understand a gentleman and how he feels about things. I only assure you that you will waste your time. And time ought—" I said it with meaning—"to be worth more to you now than all the valuables you picked from the pockets of the *Atlantis* passengers."

HE CAME up to me, and I thought that this was the moment. But he only tore the cloth from my head and returned to his chair.

I looked round with interest. The room, no doubt part of the cavern system into which the mine had penetrated, was matchboarded all round. The boarding was painted white, and a cluster of electrics hung from the ceiling.

There was a carpet on the floor, a couple of armchairs, a writing-table and a big steel safe. In one corner was another door than the entrance one, partly concealed by a green curtain hanging from a brass rod.

Helzephron himself sat opposite. The handsome, hawk-like face was badly bruised. He stared at me with concentrated malignancy. Then he smiled with a flash of large white teeth.

"Really I should hardly have known you," he said.

"I should have recognized you anywhere even with the bruises," I replied. "Mr. Ashton left you your teeth, I see."

His face grew dark. He nodded twice.

"I thought that," he said, half to himself.

"I saw the whole thing, and it was most amusing, Mr. Helzephron. I was sitting in the smaller arm of the gallery at the Mille Colonnes behind a centerpiece of flowers. I, and my companion, had concealed a periscope in the flowers and got the whole thing framed, as it were. It gave a zest to the Burgundy. But I thought you'd have made a better fight of it."

The man leaped from his chair with a savage curse and took two steps toward me with fist clenched and arm lifted.

I looked up in that convulsed and purple face.

"Quite so!" I said quietly. "I'm tied up. It's quite safe to hit me."

If he was going to torture me, and I had few illusions on the matter, I was having my innings now. He had been a gentleman once; he had been a brave soldier. It was because I knew this that I could stab him.

He didn't strike. He began to walk up and down the room, swallowing his rage with an almost superhuman effort—being what he was. Perhaps shame helped him, perhaps it was cunning; but he sat down again, and though he trembled his voice was calm.

"So you think me a coward, do you?" he said. "I'll do you the justice to say that you're none."

My mind was working with an insight that it has never possessed before or since. The key to the man's psychology was in my hand at last.

All criminals are vain. In great criminals vanity assumes colossal proportions until it becomes a real madness. Criminologists call it megalomania. It is egotism fostered and indulged to the point of monstrosity, when all moral considerations are swept away and the subject thinks himself superior to all law, and glories in his greatness.

"Lord of himself, that heritage of wo!" I think Byron said that.

"You've correctly expressed me," I told him.

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"Perhaps your detective work has not gone so far as to inform you that I hold the Victoria Cross?"

Yes, he was mad! No sane man of his extraction would have said that.

"It is a distinction above all others, Mr. Helzephron. And you'll have another very soon. Indeed, you'll never be forgotten. You'll be historic as the one V. C. who was degraded. They'll do it the day before they hang you at Pentonville, and it will be in the *Gazette*."

He grew quite white, whether from anger or shame I do not know. But I went on. Something inside me that was not myself seemed to be speaking.

"You've been living quite an artificial life, you see, surrounded by your amicable young friends and the artistic Mr. Vargus. You no doubt think of yourself as of a very glorious order. Making war on society, Ajax defying the thunder, king of the air, and all that sort of thing. I'll bet anything you've compared yourself to Napoleon a thousand times! It's the way the late Kaiser of Germany fell. It's called megalomania.

"But you aren't anything of the sort, you know. You are a cowardly thief, who steals and murders for the sake of his pocket. You asked me a question and I've answered it."

He heard each word. His eyes became glassy and his jaw dropped. For all the world he was like an evil child who hears the truth about itself, and all the power was wiped out of his face as chalk-marks are wiped off a blackboard.

He got up abruptly and left the room by the curtained door. He was away for ten minutes.

When he returned he was his old self, but with an addition—he had been drinking back his devilishness. There was a strong odor of brandy as he entered. His eyes were full and liquid, and he was amazingly vital.

I knew that I could hurt him no longer. He wore impenetrable armor. He sat down and lit a cigaret. He smiled with an evil good humor. It was his hour now.

"Well, we've got acquainted at last," he began in an easy conversational tone. "You've been excessively clever in hunting me down, and your powers of insult are exceptional.

"I admit again that you have smoked me out here, but as to putting an end to my activities, that's a very different story. Your people can't get at me once I'm out of this snug retreat, and they can't force an entry here until I'm gone.

"So much as between the Commissioner of Police and the Pirate. You've had your say and I've had mine."

"Then there is nothing more to be said."

"Excuse me; as man to man, there's a good deal. I purchased an evening paper on the afternoon of the evening when I was attacked by your hired bully."

At last the conversation was growing interesting.

"With stolen money?" I asked impudently. But it fell dead flat. I don't think he even heard me.

"The paper made public some news that I had already gathered from another source. The news of your engagement, Sir John Custance."

WE STARED at each other in dead silence for half a minute.

"To Miss Constance Shepherd—" he went on.

I said nothing.

"—who at this moment is not twenty yards away from you, and who will fly with me tonight to where all your police boats will never find us."

"By force."

"Well, up to the present I admit that I have had to take the law into my own hands. I am a man who believes in getting what he wants. Your arrival, the fact that you're my guest for a short time, has given my thoughts quite a new direction."

I saw that there was a deep and sinister meaning in what he said, but not an inkling of the abominable truth came to me. He understood that from my face, and he laughed out loud.

"Oh, this is going to be enormously refreshing," he cried. "This is going to make everything worth while."

My heart turned to stone as I watched that unholy merriment.

When he had finished laughing, he said: "Miss Shepherd does not know as yet that I have the honor of entertaining you! I am about to inform her. And then if she wishes it, as no doubt she will, you must really meet. Journeys end in lovers' meetings, they say."

He was about to add something when there was a knock at the door. Mr. Vargus came in.

"All loaded," he said, looking nervously at me as if wondering what had passed during his absence. "All loaded and everything ready for a start. The others have gone up to the house."

"Well, there's nothing to report or they would have telephoned down. There is no hurry for an hour yet."

Helzephron took the short man by the arm and drew him into a corner of the room. They whispered together for nearly ten minutes. I could not catch a word.

Then Vargus nodded with an air of triumphant comprehension and left the room.

"On second thoughts," said Helzephron, "I am not going to prepare Miss Shepherd.

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We will let it be in the nature of a pleasant surprize."

He disappeared through the green-curtained door.

CHAPTER XV

TORTURED SOULS

IN RELATING what is immediately to follow I shall do so with as plain and unvarnished a narrative as my pen can command. You will read of what Constance and I endured, but do not ask me to do more than hint at the anger of my soul. It is impossible to describe, at least it would require the pen of a Dante or a Milton, nor would I describe it if I could.

It is bad enough to live that hour again even faintly and in imagination. To call it up into full memory—soul memory—is a task for which I have not the least inclination. You shall therefore have the facts with very little comment upon them.

I think it's about all you'll need.

Helzephron was away for a considerable time. During his absence Vargus peeped in once and looked at me. I won't describe his face.

When the hawk-faced man returned he dragged my chair to the far end of the room and pushed the writing-table in front of it to form a barrier. There was a deliberation in all he did that was inexpressibly alarming. His lips were drawn in a tight smile, so that I could see the teeth.

He set a chair over against the wall opposite and then he went through the curtained door. A moment afterward he entered, followed by Connie.

The room grew whirlingly dark and cleared. I could not speak, for my throat seemed to be closing up, but I saw my girl very distinctly.

She was, as I had never seen her, deadly pale, with large, dark rings under her eyes and all the joy of life ironed out of her sweet face. Yet she was not thinner and there were no lines. The color had gone from her cheeks and the luster from her hair, but I somehow thought that her physical health had not suffered alarmingly.

When she spoke I knew that this was true, and I knew why. Her indomitable spirit remained. The sunny courage of the past had condensed within her soul and turned to unconquerable purpose.

Her voice was so full of scorn that it cut even me like the lash of a whip. It was a marvel that the tall man could have borne it for a moment.

But his eyes had a red light in them, like the eyes of a hound—mad.

"What new deviltry is this?" the girl said as her eyes fell upon me, trussed up there behind the table. "Do you suppose that I want any further evidence to tell me from where you come and whom you serve?"

"Look at this gentleman; look at him well."

"Another of your unhappy prisoners! So you add torture to your crimes. And you dare to make me witness it!"

She turned in a fury of disgust and loathing and made a step toward the door. But before she moved farther—God bless her!—she said—

"You have fallen into the hands of a very horrid scoundrel, sir, but ——"

At that I managed to cry out——

"Connie, dearest, don't you know me?"

I ought not to have been so sudden. I cursed myself for it. It was just as if I had struck her down, for she reeled and fell into the chair in a swoon.

I myself was near to it. There was a rush as of cataracts, a sensation of drowning. When I recovered, the maid, Wilson, was ministering to her mistress; there was a sound of pouring liquid, though I could see nothing, for Helzephron stood directly in front of me, watching what went on.

"Look here, Helzephron," I said hoarsely. "This can't go on. For —— sake stop it! Get her away before she recovers and do what you like to me."

I thought desperately for something that would move him.

He turned round slowly.

"Too late now," he said slowly. "You've got to go through with it, both of you."

The malice had faded out of his eyes. He spoke dreamily—

"There is no other way."

He moved away and leaned against the wall at the side, looking down moodily at Constance, who was coming to herself. Her eyes opened and Helzephron made an impatient gesture with his arm. The maid, Wilson, vanished like a ghost. I could see that she, poor thing, went in terrible fear.

I spoke out directly I thought Connie could understand. I was desperately determined to have my say. It might be the last chance. To my surprize, though I soon understood the reason, Helzephron did not interrupt.

"Yes, it is I, Constance. I'm disguised; that is why you didn't know me. Darling, it's going to be all right. Be brave a little longer."

I saw comprehension dawn in her eyes, and then they blazed out into love.

"John! You've come at last. It's been weary waiting. But you are tied up."

Her voice changed.

"You're in the power of this man, too!"

"For this moment I may be; but that is nothing. He is tracked down and his hour has come. He knows it. I made a mistake and he captured me, but outside the forces are converging, and for him the whole world is now no wider than this little room.

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HELZEPHRON made no sign. From his great height he stared down at us like a stone figure. I doubt if he either saw or heard.

"Tell me quickly—he has not ill-used you, he has not laid hands on you, hurt you——"

A bitter laugh burst from her.

"He has stolen me away from life and kept me here a prisoner. But there has been food to eat, and the cage is gilded with the proceeds of his thefts.

"He knows well enough that if he dared to touch me I should kill myself. No power on earth and none of his cunning precautions could prevent it, and that also he knows. Thank God his time has come."

"Tell me everything, quickly," I urged. "A lot depends on it."

How could I explain that he was going to kill me, that he could and would do so long before there was any chance of help arriving?

"He has dared," she said, and I never knew that a woman's voice could be so hard, "dared to offer me what he calls love. The word is hideous in such a mouth. He has raved, threatened and implored me to—to marry him —to fly away with him and be his wife."

She shuddered terribly and sank back in the chair as if exhausted. I racked my brains for words. What could I say or do? That she would kill herself rather than yield an inch I was certain. But he could still prolong her torture.

The chances were that he would get away in his marvelous ship for a time. On the other hand it might well be that the searching airships were in such force by now that even the Pirate Ship could not escape. There would be a battle in the air. She would be shot to pieces by our cruisers' heavy guns. And Connie would be on board.

What could I say?

Helzephron stood up from the wall. With slow movements he lit a cigaret, but his hand was trembling as if in a palsy. He spoke to Constance.

"You have already told me that you love Sir John Custance," he said. "I heard that from your own lips two days ago. But 'love' means many things. And you may well have said it to keep me at arm's length. Sir John Custance is here now, and in my power. What of him and you?"

Connie looked at him for a moment without a word. There was not a trace of fear in her eyes.

"I will tell you," she said at length. "That man is my man and I am his woman from now until the end of time and for all eternity. You can not understand, I know. But if words have meaning mine are plain enough."

Helzephron suddenly threw away his cigaret and gave what seemed to be a sigh of relief. The sound, the gesture, were startling. I could not understand.

"Well," he said, "that is another, and the last, illusion gone. My life has been a succession of lost illusions, I think. I love you, and I love you still, with all the force and power of a nature which, whatever else it may be, is stronger than that of most men in this feeble world.

"I would have given you a love so rich, abundant and wonderful that you would have forgotten your passion for this man. Mine would have consumed it utterly. And you would have responded. You think not, but I know better. It would have been flame and flame—love. Now I see that it is indeed too late."

His tones were not raised; there was nothing particularly eloquent in the actual words he spoke. But to me they tolled like a great bell—a bell that tolls while the iron gates of hell are opening slowly.

"Yes, too late," Connie said quickly. "And you see it now. It could never have been. And now you will let us go. Oh, be quick! Untie John; please do; it must be hurting him so!"

For the first and last time that night two tears rolled down my cheeks.

I SUPPOSE that for a brief space there had been some lingering nobility in Helzephron's mind, some flicker of life in that dark soul. The man had not always been under the dominion of evil.

But now I saw without possibility of mistake the final eclipse of good. It was a visible thing, the last awful act in the terrible drama of his life, and it took place before one's eyes like crystals dissolving in a glass.

He looked steadfastly at Constance.

"Sir John can go," he said; "for all the debt of ill-will I owe he can go from here unharmed. My dear girl, it rests entirely with you."

She did not understand.

"Oh, then let him go now, at once."

"That man," he answered, "lives, or dies a peculiarly unpleasant death; goes free, or is nothing but a heap of clothes in half an hour, as you shall decide, Constance."

By the slow dilation of her eyes, I think she knew what he would say.

"It is like this," he went on. "If I can not have Love, the real thing, at least Fate has put it in my power to demand —and have—the second best, the semblance of it. The moment that you give me your solemn promise to marry me Sir John walks out on to the moor."

I gave Constance one swift, warning look. Would the man believe that another was as base as he himself? Everything depended on that.

"You can not do it, Constance," I said with

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a careful tremor in my voice, trying to suggest a slight dawn of hope, and again I sent her a signal of caution.

Helzephron gave an almost imperceptible start, and a faint smile began to play about his cruel lips.

The fish was rising.

"It would be a martyrdom," I went on. "What is my life worth—even to the State—" I thought that was a clever touch—"in exchange for such a sacrifice?"

Praise God for her quick wits! She saw that I was acting and fell into her part with supreme naturalness. A wail of pain came from her, and she covered her face with her hands.

"I can not let you die," she cried. "Do I not love you? Is not your life of supreme value?"

I spoke in a tone of hardly veiled eagerness.

"But your own happiness, what of that?"

Connie made a passionate gesture of renunciation. She turned to our torturer.

"Sir," she said, "have you no mercy, no compassion?"

"I have nothing but one overmastering need."

"Then leave us. Let me be alone with Sir John for a few minutes."

She beckoned to him and he came, leaning his head low.

"Go," she whispered. "I can not persuade him while you are here. Leave us alone and I will do my best."

The fool was wax in her hands. That one confidential whisper seemed to have transformed him.

"Yes, I'll go," he said; but I heard every word. "I don't think our friend will take much persuading. You may be glad to marry a man, after all!"

He was half-way to the door when suspicion took hold of him.

"How do I know that you won't be up to some trick," he snarled; "try to loose him or something? Not that there would be any chance of escape if you did."

"I give you my word of honor," Connie answered; "or you can tie me up, too. That would be the best way. Fasten me in this chair so that I can't move."

Helzephron shook his head impatiently. Then the door banged and we were alone.

I began to speak at once. There was no time to waste.

"Dearest, it is good-by. We have managed to snatch these few moments for farewell."

Her face shone with love and courage as she smiled at me.

"Is there no way, darling?"

"None. This is the end. We have fooled that devil for a minute. When he returns and finds out the end will come quickly. Now, listen."

IN A few sentences I told her exactly how matters stood, and of my certainty that Helzephron's course was almost run. Nor did I disguise from her that in any attack upon the Pirate Ship her own fate was sure.

"What does it matter? I should kill myself anyhow rather than submit to one touch from him. I have the means ready. Oh, my love, I am prouder of you at this moment than I ever was!"

How I rejoiced in her! Never for a single instant had she believed that I would let her do this thing. It was not even spoken of between us. It was worth while dying for love and trust like this!

"And you see, dear love," she went on, "it will not be long. We shall be together again in a few hours, never to part any more."

Very solemnly and quietly we said farewell. Neither of us was unhappy. A great exaltation and peace consoled us, but the moment is too sacred for description here.

I gave one last look at her serene and radiant face, striving to image it upon my brain so that it should be the last thing I saw, and then I called for Helzephron with a strong voice.

From the first instant that he stepped into the room and saw our faces he knew the truth.

He was very quiet, but his eyes shone again with the dull red light that you may sometimes see in a dog's eyes. One could almost have pitied him, for he was as one who desired even one drop of living water to cool his tongue and was tormented in a flame.

I was praying hard for one boon—that Constance should not see me die. It seemed that my prayer was answered, for he led her roughly to the curtained door and pushed her through.

He whistled, and Vargus came in through the other door. The movements of both men were detached and business-like. I had the odd fancy that this was exactly how the paid executioner goes about his work in the prisons.

Once more the cloth was tied over my head, the chair was lifted, and I was carried away. The swinging motion lasted a long time. I must have been taken a considerable distance from the room of my agony when the chair was finally set down.

I heard the plangent beating of waves and felt cool airs. I was in the central cavern once more, and near to the mouth of it. So that was it! They were going to throw me to the whirlpools and the rocks below!

I felt strong and slender fingers about my neck—Vargus the pianist!—and shuddered at the contact. The cloth was removed. It was as I thought; all round was the cathedral-like cave, but now dozens of lights were turned on, including a great blue arc-lamp suspended from the roof, and all the shadows and mystery were gone.

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Not far away, resting upon rubber-covered wheels, which were dropped below the floats by an adaptation of the Raynor-Wallis patent, was the great Pirate Ship, towering up under the domed roof, spreading her great planes from side to side, lovely in her lines, an awful instrument of power. Even at that supreme moment I longed to examine her, to go aboard and make acquaintance with the wonders she held.

The ruling passion of a man's life dies hard!

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOUNDS FROM TIBET AND MR. VARGUS; WITH A DISCOVERY ON BOARD THE PIRATE

THEY turned my chair so that I faced the mouth of the cave, which was some thirty yards away. The moon had set. The short Summer night was over, and the first gray hint of the dawn that I should never see was near.

Helzephron sat down on a stool a few yards away from me. His back was to the cavern mouth. He spoke a word to Vargus, who padded away behind me.

"Why are we waiting?" I said.

"Because you had the misfortune to hear my friend Vargus pouring his soul out at the piano, Sir John."

"I am still rather in the dark."

"I have no objection to satisfying a curiosity which is legitimate under the circumstances. I was going to put a pistol to your ear and throw you into the cove. But Mr. Vargus has fantastic tastes, and you have put his back up. He asked me a favor, and as I owe him a good deal I could not refuse it.

"But I see he is returning. You shall have a concrete explanation."

From somewhere behind me I heard the padding of footsteps, accompanied by a curious scuffling noise and the sound of heavy breathing. Then Helzephron gave a short bark of laughter, and Vargus came round the chair.

Then I knew.

On leather leashes Vargus held two monstrous dogs. Each one was as big as a newly born calf. They were like Newfoundlands and yet unlike, for there was a great bulldog jowl to each.

"My Tibetan mastiffs," said Helzephron. "Death by dogs for a dog!"

Vargus brought the brutes within two yards of me. Their teeth were bared; their hackles rose; there was the dull red light in their eyes, too; but not a sound came from either.

Both men watched me intently, but they got none of the satisfaction that they hoped. It was simply that the bitterness of death was over. That was all.

Fear was something that I was no longer capable of feeling. To be worried to death by mastiffs was just like any other death, then. I understood how it was that martyrs for religion, or any cause in which they believed, died so quietly.

Helzephron cursed deeply.

"Get it over," he said. "Take the dogs to the far end of the cave. When I blow this whistle let them go. You'll hear them running up behind you, Sir John," he said with an insane chuckle.

Vargus disappeared.

I stared out at the cave-mouth. Each moment it grew lighter. I thought that I should have liked to see one more Summer dawn. But Helzephron was lifting his whistle; and then the mouth of the cave seemed to recede and shrink to the size of a mere window.

A mere window. With idle curiosity I saw how a fat spider was slowly descending his swinging thread, and I was a child again, seated at the nursery window.

The whistle blew a shrill, echoing blast.

At once my mind awoke to full consciousness, and I braced myself to die without a cry. The cave-mouth became itself again, and the spider——

Hanging by one arm and a leg, half-way down a stout rope, was a short, thick-set figure.

As the rapid thud of the racing dogs grew loud the figure's right arm raised itself.

Bang! Crash! Bang! Crash! A wild howl of pain, thunderous echoes rolling down the cavern, and Helzephron on his feet in time to see something bounding toward him like an india-rubber ball.

I knew who that was. I had one glimpse of a terrible grinning face as Danjuro leaped at the hawk-faced man; heard a strangled scream and a long, crunching crack, and saw two whirling figures crash to the floor.

I CAN'T express the suddenness of it all. Before my brain could register the impression another person was springing by me, yelling like a fiend. Then Danjuro rose from the floor—alone —and my ropes were being divided, my stiff limbs rubbed, and a calm, exultant voice remarked——

"Exit honorable Helzephron."

I began to laugh weakly.

"You were just in time, Danjuro. Have you killed him?"

He was about to reply when there was a diversion.

Charles Thumbwood appeared. He had Mr. Vargus by the collar and was kicking him along to the accompaniment of flowers of language that I shall not attempt to reproduce.

"Caught 'im at the telephone," gasped Charles. "Gr-r-r, you little swine—" a furious kick. "Gr-r-r, you slime-lapping leper you! 'E was telephoning to 'is friends, Sir John.

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Thank Gawd we come in time, Sir John! Gr-r-r, there's one as you won't forget in an 'urry!"

And lifting Mr. Vargus several inches from the floor with a final kick, Little Thumbwood flung him away, began to feel me all over with trembling hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

But I had caught his words. The telephone! We should have all the band upon us in two minutes, desperate and fighting for their lives.

"Quick!" I shouted. "Follow me. We must get Miss Shepherd safe. There isn't a moment to lose."

I don't know how I did it, and the first few yards were like running on red-hot plowshares; but I got going and raced down the great cave past the Pirate Ship to the door at the end.

I noticed a door on the left as I ran. It was the one by which I had first entered, the one that marked the passage leading to the lift.

"Block that somehow!" I called to Thumbwood. "It may keep them back for a minute or two. Shoot any one who breaks through."

He understood and stopped at once. I saw him dragging up some cases to make cover and lying down behind them, as I turned just outside the door which led to the anteroom to Helzephron's private sanctum.

We found Constance upon her knees in a richly furnished room. Her maid, Wilson, was weeping and trembling in a corner. As we burst in Wilson shrieked with terror.

But Constance fainted dead away.

I took that unfortunate woman Wilson and shook her into sanity. There was nothing else to be done, and I remember that it seemed quite natural and obvious at the time. I knew that we hadn't a moment to lose, and I was in a state of abnormal excitement.

When she had regained some sort of control, which was in less than a minute, I ordered her to attend to Constance, and when she came to herself to tell her that we were all saved and Helzephron was powerless. Then I hurried out into the cave.

Danjuro and Thumbwood were working like demons. Piles of boxes and other impedimenta had been erected in two strategic positions commanding the door. Behind each pile were two or three automatic rifles and many clips of ammunition. Just as I came up Danjuro went to the door and opened it wide.

I grasped his idea at once. As you may remember from my former description, the passage was a mere cleft in the rock. Certainly not more than one man could walk abreast, and he could be shot down the moment he turned the corner. A child who could shoot straight would have been able to hold the passage, and behind the barrier on the floor of the cave would have been safe enough.

"I trust honorable lady quite safe?" said Danjuro in his quiet, silky voice.

"Yes; the maid's attending to her. Thank God that unutterable scoundrel has not harmed her."

Then I remembered something. Danjuro's face was perfectly placid and ordinary. The grinning devil-mask had vanished as if it had never been. To look at him no one would have guessed that he was anything but a peaceable little Eastern student, such as you may see by the dozen any day round about the Law Courts in town.

He rolled a cigaret in his conjuring way as I spoke; and yet a few moments ago those slender hands had just broken the neck of the master criminal of Europe!

"Look here, old chap," I said. "I haven't had a moment to thank you. You and Charles arrived in the very nick of time. A few seconds more and I should have been done for; and as for Miss Shepherd——"

I couldn't go on. I just held out my hand.

He didn't take it—cold-blooded little beggar! He just bowed politely and murmured something that sounded like—

"Glad to be of any help!"

Then he brightened up.

"I think, Sir John," he said, "that we can reckon ourselves as quite safe from any intrusion now." And he waved his hand toward the open door.

"Let 'em all come!" remarked Thumbwood.

Then quite suddenly the floor of the cave seemed to heave up and down. The great arc-lights which made it as bright as day began to wheel round like fireworks, and I fainted for the second time.

WHEN I recovered it was to find myself in the late Helzephron's own room. Something cold was on my forehead and something chilly and scented trickled down my face. I opened my eyes, and Constance was kneeling by my side.

"My love, my dear love!" she whispered. "I never thought that I should see you alive again. Oh, thank God, thank God!"

Then her arms were round me, and for a long time we spoke no word. I think I know what the man who was called back from death in Palestine long ago must have felt.

She gave me food and wine, and at last, though I felt physically weak and shaken, my mind worked again, and I stood up. We were alone in the room, and no sound came from outside, so I concluded that all was safe for the present.

"A little Japanese carried you in here," Connie said, "as easily as if you were a child. I had just come to myself, and I thought, oh, John, I thought that you had been killed, and that he was one of those awful people. But

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he shouted out at once that what Wilson said was true and we were saved.

"I believed him in spite of the shock his appearance gave me at first, and when he had put you down gently in this chair he hurried away. John, who is he, and how are we saved?"

"We owe everything to him," I answered gravely. "He killed Helzephron with his own hands—" I did not tell her about the dogs just then—"and in a few hours we shall be back in the world. We can never, as long as we live, pay our debt to Danjuro."

In as short a time as I could I explained everything to her from the first moment when I had heard of her capture until now. I walked about the room as I did so, and new life flowed into my cramped limbs. When I had smoked a cigaret I felt almost normal again.

"Now, dear," I said when my story was over, "we aren't exactly out of the woods yet, though there's nothing whatever to be alarmed at. Go into your own room and collect your things together; whatever you want to take away with you. Stay here with Wilson till I come again. I may be some time. There are a good many things to straighten out."

One more embrace and I left her sobbing with great happiness, and, passing through the anteroom, hurried out into the great cave.

My first glance was toward the door of the rock-passage leading to the lift. It was still open. Sitting on the barrier twelve yards or so away was Thumbwood. A rifle lay across his knees and he was placidly smoking his pipe.

"All right?" I shouted.

"All O.K., Sir John," he answered, standing up. "Not a sign of any one. As a matter of fact Mr. Danjuro and me have ascertained that this 'ere dog-fancier 'adn't time to get through to his friends up-stairs. I got 'old of 'im just as he was topping the fence."

I followed his glance, and I saw Mr. Vargus, trussed like a fowl, on the floor a yard or two away.

I had quite forgotten that ingenious and artistic person, and I started. He was a sorry sight enough, dirty, blood-stained and horrible, as his pale, wicked face stared up at me. He said nothing, and I shuddered as I looked at him—shuddered as I had never done at Helzephron.

"Where's Mr. Danjuro?" I asked.

"Up at the mouth of the cave, Sir John. I was to send you to him directly you came."

I nodded, turned and began to walk up the great cave. The Pirate Air-ship lay there, gleaming and wonderful.

There was a light steel ladder at her side as I passed, leading up into the fusilage, and it was only by a strong effort of will that I could keep myself from mounting it and exploring the mechanical marvels that I knew she contained. However, I resisted the temptation and hurried on. The lights depending from the roof grew dimmer each moment as I drew near the curving entrance.

"It must be full day outside," I thought as the fresh sea-air came to meet me; and then as I turned round the bend I saw the squat, black figure of the Japanese silhouetted against the rosy fires of sunrise.

Danjuro was standing motionless. He was looking down at some humped objects upon the ground. The rope, like a wisp of spider's web, swung gently to and fro. There was not a sound save the soft murmur of the sea far down below.

"I'm all right now," I said, and he turned to me without a start, though he could not have heard me coming.

His face was calm, but wrinkled up in every direction. He looked like a man of immense age, and his narrow eyes were full of brooding, somber light.

Almost at his feet lay the body of Helzephron. It had been decently disposed with the hands up on the breast, and the morning light played over the hawk-like, bronzed face and open eyes in which there was now no cruelty.

The dead man was august as he lay there. There was a certain nobility about his features. He did not look like a scoundrel, and all resentment and hate passed away from me forever as I looked at him.

The two huge dogs, one with a bullet through its brain, the other shot in the chest and through the heart as it was in the act of leaping, were hideous objects.

When I looked up again the wrinkles had gone from Danjuro's face, the somber expression from his eyes. It was a magical change, but I was long past wonder at anything in connection with him.

"We will have those dogs skinned," he remarked in his ordinary voice. "They will make a fine rug for your house, Sir John."

"No doubt; but we've got to get out of this first. Remember that there are a dozen desperate scoundrels not far away. And I don't see either Miss Shepherd or myself returning to the world up that rope! By the way, I haven't heard how you managed to get here in time."

HE TOLD me the story shortly enough. There was not an unnecessary detail and no comment whatever. Thumbwood supplied the lacking picturesqueness some days later. But even as Danjuro told it I realized the marvelous sagacity and contempt of danger that had saved us.

It seemed that when he had arrived at Zerran the idea of a cave, either natural or enlarged by pretended mining operations, was already in his mind. As soon as I had left the

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inn on my expedition Danjuro and Thumbwood had taken one of Trewhella's boats and set out eastward along the coast. The Japanese had already taken his bearings, and knew that Tregeraint House would be a little to the left of the jagged peak of Carne Zerran.

They cruised along into the moonlight until they picked up their mark, and not two hundred yards farther on struck the entrance to the S-shaped cove. Then Danjuro had no longer any doubts. No boat could live in that caldron of the waves, but it seemed a man could, for our rescurers proved it!

He stripped and went in—I learned afterward that he was as much at home in the water as a seal, and of course, like so many of his countrymen, he was simply a mass of steel muscles. In twenty minutes the secret was a secret no longer.

Danjuro's next move was to row back to Zerran Cove at top speed and hasten up the cliff-path to the inn. Here he disinterred the coast-guard from the pigsty and roused him to immediate action.

Ropes and crowbars were procured, the fenced-off "dangerous" area on the cliff-top invaded, and Danjuro, with Charles, descended in the nick of time. But there was more than this. The coast-guard had his orders.

Directly the two men disappeared over the brink he was instructed to make all haste to the watch-house, some two miles away in the direction of St. Ives. From there the chief boatswain was to telephone all along the coast to the various stations, and also to the police at St. Ives, Camborne and Penzance.

"In three or four hours, perhaps sooner," Danjuro concluded, "an armed force should be concentrating on the moors upon the house above. The pirates will be desperate and will put up a fight—at least I think so—but the end is certain."

"And meantime all we can do is to wait here until something happens?"

"That is as you please, Sir John," he answered, looking at me curiously.

For a minute I did not see what he meant, but then a great idea dawned upon me.

"The Pirate Ship!" I burst out.

"I have always heard that Sir John Custance is a skilled pilot," he said with a bow.

I saw it all clearly. There was a gorgeous, dramatic end to it all well within my grasp! It would be something to make the whole world gasp! The Pirate Ship was, I knew, already loaded with the proceeds of the pirate's robberies. It was not only full of loot but prepared in every way for a long cruise.

Helzephron and his ruffians had planned an almost immediate escape from the cave to some new refuge of which I had heard them speak. Doubtless if things had gone right with them they would have been off by now, with my mangled body tossed in the whirlpools below and Constance still a prisoner.

Helzephron would have mounted to a great height and trusted to his immense superiority in speed over all the air-ships in existence for escape. I have little doubt that had things fallen out as he planned he would have been able to carry out his scheme. But God disposes.

There was nothing, so I thought at the moment, to prevent me from piloting the airship out of its lair. Once in the sky I could make a bee-line for Plymouth and get there in a little more than half an hour—if it was indeed true that the mysterious ship could do her two hundred and forty M.P.H.

To swoop down to Plymouth sea-drome with Constance, the Pirate Ship and the recovered treasure! That would indeed be a triumph such as is given to few men to experience. I have a fairly vivid imagination, and I saw it all in one radiant picture.

"LET'S go and have a look at the ship at once," I said, and almost ran back into the cavern, where she towered up and threw black velvet shadows in the fierce blue light that streamed down from the suspended arcs. Danjuro followed.

As I swung myself over the side and descended a short ladder I found myself in a roomy main cabin. A switch to my hand illuminated it, and even then I saw the ship had been designed by a master hand. Below the port-holes, filled with toughened glass and provided with shutters of a design that was new to me, ran a continuous seat of woven camel's-hair cord, easily convertible into sleeping-bunks for half a dozen people.

There was an electric stove of polished aluminum for cooking and an electric radiator for warming the cabin, clustering round a central supporting column. I saw also that there was a very complete telephone installation connecting this main cabin with the pilot's room forward.

Under the seats was a collection of wooden cases and a box of japanned steel, which I judged, and rightly, contained the treasure taken from the *Albatros* and the *Atlantis*. A sliding door aft led into a storeroom which seemed to contain everything necessary for a cruise of several days.

I noticed boxes of expensive cigars, bottles of whisky and liqueurs, tinned oysters, larks, asparagus, such as wealthy yachtsmen provide themselves with. The dogs did themselves well!

Leading out of this was a final cabin fitted with tools of every sort, a rack of automatic rifles and pistols, and several thousand rounds of small-arms ammunition. Here also, with a padded door, was a little compartment for the wireless operator, and I pictured one of the black-hearted scoundrels sitting there and

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picking up the messages from air-ships of the trade routes with a grin upon his face.

Danjuro came with me and looked about him quickly but with no change of expression.

"So far so good," I said to him; "but all this is unimportant really, though it is very complete. What really matters is the pilot's cabin, the engines, controlling-gear, petrol supply and so on. Let's go forward. Do you understand anything about air-ships?"

"A very little, Sir John," he replied, and—so petty are we all at times—I felt a perceptible thrill of pleasure at hearing there was at least something of which this paragon was ignorant.

"Never had occasion to study them?" I asked as we passed again through the main cabin.

"I have watched the pilot in honorable Van Adam's yacht the *May Flower*, but that is all."

I hardly heard him, for I was in the pilot's room at last.

I saw at a glance that here were a number of things absolutely new to me, and so to all the aviators of the world. I am not going to be technical. This narrative is written for the general reader, and my expert conclusions have been published elsewhere. I can but indicate some of the wonders of mechanical skill with which I was confronted.

For instance the designer of the ship was the first man to solve the problem of easy control. Up to the present all pilots had controlled their ships—the movements of planes and rudders, etc.—with a certain amount of manual labor.

It is true that recent inventions had minimized this; ball-bearings, the rack and pinion, had made the main control levers and wheels much easier to move than they were in the old days of the Great War when flying first began to come into its own. But there was still a great deal of physical strain, which greatly lessened efficiency upon a long cruise. Moreover the instant decision necessary to be taken by an aviator—when a fraction of a second may spell safety or ruin—had been always hampered by the comparative mechanical slowness of control.

In the Pirate Ship this disability did not exist. Just as the largest ocean-going liner—sea-ship, not air-ship, I mean—can be steered by a wheel not more than two feet in diameter by the invention of the steam steering-gear, so the Pirate Ship was controlled by a series of little wheels and levers, covered with leather.

Electricity had been brought into play, and a touch of the pilot's hand was magnified into power that in an instant would deflect a mighty lifting-plane or vast rudder.

The fuel capacity of the ship was immense. She carried as much petrol in the huge and ingeniously contrived tanks below the fusilage as one of the great air liners, though she was not a fifth of the size. I saw at once that she could keep the air for days.

EXAMINING the cockpit, in which two quick-firing guns were placed, I found them both of the very latest pattern, and mounted with a swivel device that was far in advance of anything attempted hitherto. Only the great battle-planes of the world's air navies could mount guns of such power, and she could circle round them with ease while in full flight.

But it was when I mounted to the little deck above and began to examine the two huge six-cylinder engines that my admiration and interest grew beyond all bounds. The chief triumph of all, the silencing-mechanism that reduced the ordinary roar of air engines to no more than the hum of a dynamo, did not at once become clear. It would have been necessary to take the machines to pieces to discover everything; but an examination of the exhausts put me on the track, and I marveled at the creation of a master mind.

I was looking at the twin propellers, which had a curve that was new to me, and even material that I could not immediately define, when Danjuro hailed me from the pilot's room.

I tumbled down to find the little man bending over the various controls ranged in front of the pilot's seat.

"It seems to me, Sir John," he said—"pray correct me if I am wrong—that there is something wanting here. I know little about air-ships, but something of electricity, and can quite understand this system. But it seems to me that a key part of the mechanism has been removed."

He pulled over a lever a few inches long. Its movement should have been registered upon a dial above, but the needle never moved.

"Do that again!" I cried, and, mounting a step, put my head into the little dome of glass in the cabin roof which commanded the whole length of the ship. One of the tilting-planes by the rudder should have moved when the lever was pulled over.

It remained motionless.

"One of the honorable gentlemen up-stairs has got a small but very essential piece of linking-apparatus in his pocket," said Danjuro.

It was only too true. A moment's reflection satisfied me of that, and I stared blankly at my companion.

My gorgeous, if somewhat vainglorious, plan was knocked on the head.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MOMENT OF TRIUMPH

I DESCENDED from the air-ship in silence. Danjuro followed me. Thumbwood was still on guard. The bundle that was Mr. Vargus lay upon the ground, and a face like a white wedge of venom stared up at us.

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There was no sign of the enemy, but I felt that we should not be left in peace much longer, and my disappointment at the discovery on board the pirate was keen.

"There is still a chance," Danjuro whispered in my ear. "And with your permission, Sir John, I am going to try it."

I nodded, and he stepped up to Vargus and pulled him up into a sitting posture, propping him against the barrier.

"There is a part of the control mechanism of the air-ship missing," Danjuro said with silky politeness.

Vargus grinned suddenly, a momentary rictus that came and went, utterly horrible.

"And we want that piece of the machine," the Japanese went on.

Vargus spoke in his peculiar oily voice.

"Then you may go on wanting, you putty-faced little spawn of a monkey."

I can not hope to describe the depth of poisonous hate the man put into the words. His accent was cultured and refined; the great dome of the blood-stained forehead spoke loudly of intellect, yet the voice somehow reeked of the pit.

I know that it struck me cold, and I saw the rifle in Thumbwood's hands was shaking. Although this was the man who had devised an abominable death for me I can honestly say that I felt no personal resentment. I can't account for it, but it was so.

I should rather welcomed that, rather than the inward loathing, like a shudder of the soul, at something inhuman and unclean.

What Danjuro felt I don't know, but he didn't turn a hair.

"I think you will assist us," he said.

For answer the thing below spat in his face.

I expected to see Danjuro leap upon him and strangle him where he sat. I shouldn't have raised a finger to stop it.

But it was not so. The little man stepped aside and carefully wiped his face with a silk handkerchief that seemed to come from nowhere. Then he went behind Mr. Vargus and began to feel his head all over with quick, delicate movements of his fingers.

"How can you touch him?" I cried, hardly knowing what I said, for the thing was ugly and uncanny beyond belief.

Danjuro was like some sinister phrenologist in a nightmare, feeling the bumps of a devil.

"I know now what I wanted to know about him," Danjuro purred after a moment. "I never doubted the intelligence, Sir John. It is very marked. And there is great energy and courage of a sort.

"But our friend who spits has one little failing. He is afraid of physical pain."

"You're not going to——"

Danjuro looked me full in the eyes, and in his I saw a stony resolution that I was in no state to combat.

"I will go and see Miss Shepherd," I said, and, turning on my heel, walked quickly to the inner end of the cavern. As I went I heard Danjuro ask Thumbwood for a box of matches.

I am quite aware that there are lots of soft-hearted people who will say I ought never to have allowed Danjuro to do what he did. Well, they must have their own opinion, that's all. Call me what names you like as you read this—you have not seen Mr. Vargus and his dogs, nor spent a small eternity in the pirates' cave.

CONSTANCE was wonderfully recovered. I spent a minute or two with her, and then returned to the scene of action.

Mr. Vargus was speaking in a quick, panting voice, and these were the words I heard:

"Gascoigne, Mr. Gascoigne; he has it. He was our second pilot. It was always in his charge."

Danjuro gave his little weary smile. Then he put his hand gently upon my arm and drew me away to the other side of the cave.

"We will now summon honorable Gascoigne," he said. "He is the young gentleman we saw with late honorable Helzephron at the Mille Colonnes. The little necessary piece of the mechanism in his possession is, I have just learned, generally referred to as 'the link.' "

"But how—" I was beginning, when he pointed to a telephone instrument upon a screen of tongue-and-groove boarding.

"This communicates with the house," he whispered. "Mr. Vargus nearly got through recently, you will remember, just before the good Thumbwood caught him."

He raised the instrument to his mouth and ear.

In a second or two a bell rang and Danjuro began to speak. I nearly jumped out of my boots. The words were simple enough, but the voice with its oily refinement was the voice of Mr. Vargus!

"Is that you, Gascoigne? Yes, Vargus speaking. The chief says you are to come down at once and bring the control link with you. What? No, the others are to wait till they're sent for. What? Oh, yes, quite dead. I wish you could have seen it!"

It was a triumph of mimicry that I shall never forget, the more so as it was the only occasion on which I heard this marvelous man attempt anything of the sort. Heaven knows what other talents he must have possessed!

"The young gentleman was asking about you, Sir John. He seemed quite curious about your end."

I smiled grimly.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

In answer he hurried back to the open door

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and crouched down in the shadow by its side. I motioned to Thumbwood to lie down behind the barrier, which was exactly facing the passage; and, drawing my automatic pistol, which I had regained from Helzephron's room, I retired to the opposite side of the door and outside the line of direct vision.

There was silence for a minute or so, and then, far away in the rock, I heard a hollow rumble and the clank of a gate. The lift had descended and Gascoigne was on his way.

A few seconds afterward I heard a merry whistle, fresh and sweet, as if the performer had not a care in the world. He was whistling the lilting tune of a popular song which all the street boys were singing at that time—

Merry Maudie met her fate at Margate!

Callous young dog! In a moment he would not be so cheerful.

I had left it to that concentrated muscle, Danjuro, though I stood ready to help if necessary. But I knew that he was a supreme exponent of ju-jutsu— witness the hideous death Helzephron died—and I had little fear. Indeed, I found myself looking on with a detached and interested curiosity as one might at a prize-fight.

I wondered if Danjuro would kill him or not. And if you had supped so full of horrors as I had in that awful cave you'd have felt like that, too.

For a second I saw Gascoigne in the full light from the roof and framed by the archway, like a picture. It was the same young fellow with the dissipated face that I had seen at the restaurant, though he had not been among the singing pirates at the inn. He was extremely handsome still, with the face of a lost angel. As a boy at school he must have been beautiful.

Then the squat shadow that crouched by the lintel of the door, like a monstrous toad, expanded swiftly. Danjuro caught Gascoigne by the right hand with the speed of lightning and pulled the arm out straight with a jerk. Then as the young man was falling forward the left arm of the Japanese shot out under his captive's rigid right and the hand seized the lapel of Gascoigne's coat.

He was powerless. If he made the slightest movement Danjuro would have broken his arm like a pipe-stem. He could not swing round and hit with his left, and I saw his mouth open with foolish amazement like the mouth of a fish as his legs were kicked from under him and he fell back with his assailant on top of him.

I tied his ankles together with neatness and dispatch while I listened to a sickening flood of blasphemous profanity that flowed from the clear-cut lips of this former gentleman in a ceaseless stream. More and more I realized what a crew of utter devils Helzephron had got round him.

AT LAST he was bound, and Danjuro took from him a leather box which he wore suspended round his shoulders by a strap. He handed it to me, and, opening it, I found it was the control link that we sought.

"You can fit that in all right, Sir John?"

"Oh, yes; I don't think it presents any difficulty."

"Very well, then; in a few minutes we will start; that is, if you think you can take the ship out of this place?"

I had already considered that and decided that I could. It was a ticklish job enough and would require the most delicate care, especially with an untried ship. But in the past I had landed on the deck of a moving battle-ship, and there were few stunts that were not familiar to me. I felt I could do it.

"I don't think I shall let you down," I said, and hurried to the ship.

Five minutes showed me that I had got the hang of the apparatus and that electrical connection was restored, and I spent a further ten in thoroughly examining and getting accustomed to the controls. Moreover I made one new and startling discovery.

There was no need in this marvelous ship for mechanics to swing the propeller at the start. Again electricity from the ship's dynamo was employed, and the starting-device was a miracle of ingenuity, worked from the pilot's cabin.

Mr. Vargus, though I offered to loosen his bonds at the feet, absolutely refused to walk, and Danjuro carried him up the ladder and threw him upon the floor of the cabin like a sack of corn. Gascoigne, now very white and silent, was more amenable. It seemed that Vargus had acquainted him with everything that had passed as they lay together on the ground.

"I'll go all right, sir," he said to me as I helped him to his feet.

As I had the muzzle of my pistol in the small of his back he couldn't well do anything else, but he lost nothing by being civil.

"I can't believe that the chief's dead and everything's finished," he said with a curious sort of sob.

I realized that all sense of right and wrong had left this youth early. He was the true stuff of which criminals are made, incapable of putting himself in the place of his victims, and, while bitterly conscious of defeat and punishment to come, incapable of remorse.

Without a trace of pose this man behaved just as if he were an officer captured by the enemy in war-time, and I dare swear he felt just like that. There is only one thing to do with these abnormals that get themselves born now and then—destroy them.

Morally I felt sure that Gascoigne was not a hundredth part so responsible as Vargus. But one was born a criminal, and, from that point of

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view, insane. The other had had the capabilities of sainthood, but had opened his soul to the Dweller on the Threshold and was doubly lost.

We went slowly toward the ship.

"Good old bird!" he said as any public-school boy might have said it. "I expect this'll be the last cruise I ever take in her."

"Or in any ship at all," I answered. "I suppose you've no illusions as to what's in store for you?"

"No; I suppose it's a hanging job," he replied, and I assented, though as you will learn both his anticipations were to prove wrong.

Danjuro and I shifted Vargus out of the main cabin into the small one where the tools and spare parts were stored. We didn't want Constance to see him, and he was so well secured that he couldn't possibly do any harm.

Gascoigne we left for the present on one of the seats, and I hurried to fetch the two women, passing Thumbwood, still at his post.

"Everything is arranged," I called out as I ran through Helzephron's room. "We are going to fly to Plymouth at once in the Pirate Ship."

The maid Wilson shrieked.

"Oh, Sir John, that awful ship! I couldn't go in 'er again, not for my life. Let's go in a taxi, miss; please 'ave a taxi; I couldn't face the ship."

"You'll lose your life quickly enough if you stay," I said to the yelping fool, though Heaven knows the poor soul had gone through enough to turn her mind entirely.

Her mouth grew like a round O, and I was preparing for another shriek when I suddenly thought of something.

"Miss Connie will be quite safe with me," I said quickly, "and I shall put you in charge of Charles Thumbwood. You remember him? He'll look after you all right, Wilson."

It acted like a charm. I had remembered Charles' attention to the pretty maid in the train.

"Ow!" said Wilson. "Is Mr. Thumbwood here then, Sir John?"

"Very much so. You will be his especial charge, and the journey won't take more than three-quarters of an hour."

The girl picked up the dressing-bag, which she had dropped upon the floor.

"Then that will be all right," she said with a flush, and I wondered if she thought Charles was going to pilot the ship himself.

How true it is that faith can move mountains! No doubt Constance felt just the same about me as Mary Wilson did about Charles.

WE HAD come out into the cave and had walked a few yards toward the looming bulk of the ship when the telephone bell on the cave-side ahead of us rang furiously. It kept on like an alarm-clock; and, telling the girls to remain still for a moment, I ran up and unhooked the receiver.

A voice was bawling at the other end so loud that the words rang and buzzed one into the other, and I could distinguish only one or two. I heard enough to know what had happened, though.

"Chief. . . coast-guard police. . . rifles. . . all round the house on the moor were coming down . . . two of us stay . . . hold till last moment. . . ."

So that was it! Billy Pengelly the coast-guard had made good. The wires had been at work while we had been about our mole-like warfare underground. The avengers were among the gorse and heather, and the remainder of the pirates were doomed. . . .

"Come on," I shouted to Connie, realizing that there was literally not a moment to lose, and, alarmed by the excitement in my voice, they started to run.

When they had come up to me and I started to run with them toward the ship there was a sudden thunderous report. Looking to the right, I saw that Thumbwood had taken cover, and was lying on his stomach behind the barrier. The open door was but a dim oblong of yellow light at that distance, and I could not see a yard down the passage in the rocks.

Thumbwood fired again, and the echoing roar had not died away when something went by my ear with a vicious *zipp*, and I heard the splash of a bullet upon the granite.

The pirates were coming down in force and, finding themselves between Scylla and Charybdis, had turned at bay.

I knew Thumbwood would keep them where they were for a minute or two, and I raced to the ship with Connie at my side. Wilson had fainted, and we had to drag her between us.

Half-way up the light, steep accommodation ladder Danjuro was waiting, perfectly calm and unconcerned. We handed up the unconscious maid, and he disappeared with her in a second. Then Connie was helped up the ladder while the whole cavern began to thunder with a fusillade of rapid firing.

"The police and coast-guards are surrounding the house," I shouted, "and the rest of the crew have come down and are trying to fight their way into the cave.

"It is what I thought, Sir John. Those gentlemen must be considerably surprized at their reception! We can shoot them all down before they get out of the passage. Perhaps, now that rescue is at hand, we had better wait and do so?"

His eyes were glistening; I saw the light of slaughter in them. For an instant I hesitated. What he said was sane enough. The risk was comparatively small; it would only be postponing the triumphal flight.

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Then I took a decision—it rested with me, and I was alone responsible.

"We mustn't shoot them all down," I shouted through the din, for bullets were streaming into the cave behind as if they were pumped from a hose. "Some of them must be brought to justice. We had better be off and leave the coast-guards and police to deal with them."

Thus I spoke. I said what I honestly thought was best at the moment, though perhaps my mind was a little influenced by the natural and terrible anxiety to get my girl away from further horrors.

At any rate I decided, and all my life long I shall never cease to regret it.

"Very good," said Danjuro. "Up into the pilot's cabin quick, Sir John. You are indispensable there. Prepare for an instant start. I will run and fetch Thumbwood. We shall have to fire thirty or forty rounds quickly into the passage to keep them back.

"Of course they are firing automatic pistols round the bend now, and not exposing themselves any more. After we have fired we shall run for the ship. You will hear me shout and then start like lightning."

He slipped past me and, crouching almost to the ground, ran back toward Thumbwood like some great cat.

I flung myself aboard. Constance was attending to Wilson in the main cabin. Gascoigne was lying bound where he had been thrown, but his eyes were blazing with excitement.

I put a stop to that at once.

"The remainder of your friends are being shot down," I said curtly. "Lucky for you to be here."

All the animation died out of his face. And as I didn't want to leave him alone with Connie—it seemed a desecration that he should be in the same place with her even for a moment—I whipped out my knife, cut the bonds at his feet and pushed him into the pilot's cabin, making him lie upon the floor at my side as I got into the swivel chair. I could shoot him dead in an instant if he moved.

Then I sat rigid with my hand upon the switch which started the engines.

In reality I know now that the time of waiting was very short, but it seemed an eternity to me. For the first time my nerves felt upon the point of giving way. My hand trembled.

I began to think of the narrow S-shaped passage between high walls of rock to the sea, and realized the appalling nature of the task before me. A mere touch of the planes upon those iron barriers, and all the long struggle would prove unavailing, the triumph turn to a defeat in which my girl and I, the superman Danjuro, and faithful Thumbwood would lose our hard-won lives.

One touch and the ship would crumple up like paper and fall like a stone into the cruel caldron of jagged rock and furious waves far below.

THERE came a voice from the floor. Had the prisoner divined something of my thoughts?

"Look here, Sir John, you're up against a nasty job. It's the very devil getting out of here if you don't know the way and haven't practised it."

Something in the young fellow's voice told me that this was not mockery. He was moreover the second pilot of the Pirate Ship, trained by Helzephron himself.

"I did not ask you to speak," I answered.

"No, but really it's no end of a stunt. The controls are ten times as sensitive as in an ordinary machine. If you were the best pilot living you'd find it hard to manage in a ship that's quite new to you and has all sorts of habits and tricks that no other has.

He spoke truly enough and I knew it, but it was none the less unpleasant to hear.

"I suppose you're afraid for your —— skin," I sneered.

"Oh, come; draw it mild," he replied. "I only spoke to try and help you. I know when I'm beaten, and I don't bear any malice."

"If I do take you safely out it will only mean the gallows."

"Oh, no, it won't!" he said. "I shall turn King's evidence. There are lots of things I know that no one else except Vargus knows now. I shall get let off with fifteen years. Bet you a fiver if you like. It's to my interest to help you out."

I can generally tell when a man is sincere, and I realized that this young scoundrel was, despite—and perhaps because of—the baseness of his motive.

"Help me?"

"Yes, out of the passage. Once you get in clear air you'll fly her easily enough—and you'll be astonished, by Jove! But you'd better let me pilot you. It's the lift and the sharp right bank that are so difficult."

"Get up," I said.

He scrambled to his feet.

"Stand there."

He leaned against the wall at my side, his hands tied behind him and his arms tightly bound.

He was about to speak when suddenly we both started. Something had happened. For a moment I did not realize what it was. Then I knew.

The continuous thunder of rifle-fire had stopped. Everything was dead silent. I'd hardly become conscious of the fact when there was a loud shout.

"Let her go, Sir John! Let her go!"

Danjuro stumbled into the cabin, panting like a whippet.

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I pulled over the switch and then the lever of the starting mechanism.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOLDEN DREAM

THE strangely shaped propellers bit the air at once; the walls of the cavern, flooded with spectral light, slid backward, and as the ship swerved round the curve toward the entrance the day leaped at us.

Wow! But it was touch and go during the next ten seconds. If it had not been for Gascoigne I am sure that I should never have gone through. The great ship shot out of its lair like a dart; a touch upon the little steering-wheel and she was banking in the terrible right-hand turn; the granite walls seemed rushing to meet and crush her, and only the quick, steady words of command from the prisoner, which like an automaton I obeyed, got her finally into the straight.

And then—oh, then—I opened out the marvelous engines; she seemed to shake herself for an instant like a bird poised for a long flight, and humming like a wasp, she shot up and out to sea.

The needle upon the speed-indicator quivered round its dial, moving ever upward. Eighty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty—and thirty more—we were doing nearly two hundred miles an hour straight out over the Atlantic before I had a thought of our destination or of anything but the supreme glory of that rush up the dawnwind.

The whole morning world was blue and gold, new-built and beautiful. Far below, the Mother of Oceans lay in an unwrinkled sheet of sapphire, "as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire." A tiny purple cloud upon the horizon was the Isles of Scilly, sleeping under the sun.

Connie stole in and stood by my side, her hand upon my shoulder, and I knew that her heart also was full to overflowing as memory flared up and down in it like the flame of a lamp in a draft. It was a moment so exquisite, so full of gratitude to God, that no words of mine can do more than hint at it. For we had escaped from hell and the snare of devils, and knew it in one lightning flash of gratitude and joy.

As she stared out at the sea and sky, which glowed like the pavements of the New Jerusalem, Connie quoted some words from Milton—the song of the released spirit in his epilogue of "Comus"—

> To the Ocean now I fly,
> And those happy climes which lie
> Where Day never shuts his eye,
> Up in the broad fields of the sky.

And then as I glanced at the compass card and made a great sweep round so that we faced the jagged coasts of Cornwall once again, she whispered with a proud note in her voice—

> For still the Lord is Lord of Might
> In deeds, in deeds, he takes delight.

Then with a tiny pressure of my arm she went back to the other cabin.

I had not noticed Danjuro for the last few minutes. He had led Gascoigne behind me as soon as we had made the passage. Now he reappeared.

"Danjuro!" I cried. "This ship is wonderful beyond all imagining. There isn't her equal in the whole world. She'll revolutionize flying. It's a perfect joy to pilot her."

Danjuro nodded calmly; he was not given to enthusiasms, this man with a panther in his soul.

"I have been speaking with the prisoner," he said.

"With Vargus?"

"No, though I have been to look at him, and he is quite safe. With Gascoigne; and he has suggested something that has not occurred to either of us, Sir John."

"His help will all tell in his favor when it comes to the trial. What is it now?"

"Something eminently sensible and pressing. As you see, this ship is quite unmistakable. Any pilot would recognize her from the descriptions which have been circulated. We are now approaching the coast again and about to fly to Plymouth.

"The air must be full of armed patrol ships, and whatever our speed if we escape being shot down *en route* we should certainly be blown to pieces on approaching the sea-drome."

I flushed up. I had been an incredible ass never to have thought of that before. It was only too true. Nobody could possibly know that we had captured the Pirate Ship.

I reduced our speed to half of what it had been.

"What are we to do?" I said.

"There is a complete wireless installation on board the ship. Can you operate it, Sir John?"

"No. Even if I could leave the controls that would be impossible. I know nothing about it, unfortunately."

"Nor I, Sir John. It is a gap in my knowledge that I propose to remedy shortly. But this Gascoigne is an operator and offers to send any message."

"I suppose we can trust him? He certainly saved us from disaster coming out of the cavern."

I shuddered; I did not want to think of that blood-stained hole of horror any more if I could help it.

"Yes, I think he can be trusted. He has everything to gain, and can do no harm that I can see. I can not operate the keys of the apparatus, but I know the code, and if I stand by him I can check each letter as he sends it out."

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THEN I had an inspiration too.

"Good! And now I think I can make it quite sure. I can remember the private code of the Air Police with hardly a gap. We will call up Plymouth, and all the police boats now flying, in that private code. Meanwhile we had better run out to sea again while you are taking it down."

Again I turned the ship, and as we spiraled up and out again I formed the message in my mind and translated it word for word into the letters of the code, which Danjuro took down in pencil upon a sheet of his pocketbook.

When I had finished—and as the message was necessarily rather a long one it took some time—Danjuro marched Gascoigne away to the rear cabin, where Vargus was lying. It was there, you may remember, that the wireless apparatus was installed.

We were now reaching a great height, far above any of the regular air lanes, and I felt quite secure from any attack. Land, sea, every reminder of the world below, had vanished utterly.

With hardly a sound from the magic engines we floated in a haze of gold chrysophrase. It was like a happy dream, though never was dream so beautiful.

Connie stole in again.

"I thought I would leave Thumbwood and Wilson alone," she said. "They have been sitting side by side and whispering to each other ever since we started. Neither of them seems to have the least curiosity as to where we are or where we're going."

"How thoughtful of you, dearest! Was that the only reason you came in here?"

The rest of the conversation is not part of this story. It lasted a long time as we droned round great five-mile circles of the upper air. And then a telephone rang at my ear.

Danjuro was speaking. The message had been received at Plymouth, and an answer had been coming through for the last ten minutes. He was writing it down letter by letter from Gascoigne's dictation. Shortly afterward he brought it in to me, and as I read it off the world closed round me again and fairyland vanished.

Triumph filled my veins and reddened my blood. The message came from Muir Lockhart, who was at Plymouth again, and was one shout of wonder and congratulation.

"The whole world will thank you," it concluded.

For a little time I was intoxicated by that message. I saw myself a hero, vindicated a thousand times in the eyes of all men, the Chief of Air Police whose name would be historical.

I think there are few men of my age who would not have had their moment of vainglory; we are made so. But as I read the message to the man who had brought it I realized that I had done nothing after all, and that everything was due to his marvelous brilliancy and courage.

Thank Heaven that I realized it without a pang of envy, and I told him what I thought of him in no unstinted way.

He heard me to the end with no change of countenance. When I had done he said:

"You have been very kind, Sir John, and I greatly appreciate what you have said. If indeed you are indebted to me in any way for the help I have been able to give you can repay me, if you will."

"To the half of my kingdom!" I said with a laugh, though I was in dead earnest all the same.

"That is a promise, Sir John?"

He looked down at me with magnetic eyes.

"A promise, Danjuro."

"Then, while I live I ask you to say nothing whatever of my part in this affair. I wish it kept as secret as possible; some little part must leak out; there will be investigations, public trials, and so forth.

"But much can be kept secret, and it rests with you and Thumbwood. And as I have your promise my mind is at rest."

"But this is madness, Danjuro! You are owed the thanks of two continents. You——"

He interrupted me.

"I want nothing of the sort. I have had your thanks, and that is sufficient. The work itself is enough. My usefulness to Mr. Van Adams, the endeavor of my whole life, would be destroyed if anything were known."

Reluctantly I promised.

"But Mr. Van Adams, I shall tell *him* everything," I said.

Danjuro bowed his head. A faint flush came into his yellow face.

"If you think I have done anything worth it," he replied with a curious and touching reticence.

And this was the man with the panther in his soul! For the American millionaire he had supreme love, with devotion—worship—and for no one and nothing else on earth above or below it.

A man with a single obsession, a man of one idea. Well, most of the great men in life have been that.

I STEERED for Plymouth at full speed coming down to three thousand feet. In a flash the jagged coast, fringed with a thin line of white, came clear to view.

We sped from the Atlantic over the narrow peninsula of land which divides it from the Channel and then turned east. The Bay, with St. Michael's Mount looking like a tiny white pebble, gave place to the long, menacing snout of the Lizard, and as a few minutes later we neared Falmouth a flight of airships rose from the water of that mighty harbor and came up to join us like a flock of gulls, the big klaxon electric horns blaring a welcome.

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Dead Man's Rock and Gall Island, Looe, Mevagissey, Fowey—all slipped away astern, and the bluff outlines of Rams Head, from which the Devon watchers first signaled the Armada, came rushing into view. I had been speeding far ahead, turning back, flying all round the escorting patrol boats—which were doing all they knew—letting them see what a wonder had come into our hands, and rejoicing more and more in the powers of the ship, as I found them one by one. Now I slowed down, and signaled by horn to the leading vessel of the flotilla.

As we turned and entered Plymouth Sound the others spread themselves out in a great wedge, of which I was leader, like a skein of wild geese upon the wing. A salute of guns boomed out as we flew high on the Breakwater, and all the bells of Plymouth were ringing as I swooped down into the sea-drome.

And all this time, for three-quarters of an hour or more, our two prisoners had been alone together in the aft cabin, where the tools and spare parts were stored. Neither I nor Danjuro had given them a further thought, and it was the one fatal mistake we made upon that morning of triumph.

Thumbwood had however been in to look at them once or twice, and had seen nothing disturbing. Certainly when some of my men came to take them to the station they were lying sullen in their bonds, and not saying a word to each other of any kind.

But by that time the mischief was doubtless done.

SPACE begins to press upon me. There are still two strange and unforgettable scenes to add to this narrative, further tragedies to set down. The last scene of all, which I have called "The Epilogue," was not written for a year after the earlier part of this story, which is now published as a whole for the first time. Why this is so will become clear as you read on, if you care to follow me to the very end.

But as I would not weary you I will indicate only the happenings during the rest of that day at Plymouth in the briefest possible fashion. I am impatient to bring the story up to the hour of eleven-thirty of the same night.

Immediately we were at rest on the placid waters of the sea-drome Muir Lockhart with a strong force of Air Police came aboard. Constance and her maid were taken in a motor-boat to one of my patrol ships, which started with them for the Hounslow Aerodrome within half an hour of our arrival. We both of us thought it best that she should proceed to London immmediately, and, going by air in a Government ship, she would escape all annoyance and publicity.

All approach to the sea-drome was barred, and though the Hoe was crowded with spectators none of them could approach anywhere near to us. When I had given Lockhart an outline of what had occurred the two prisoners were taken over the pool with a strong guard and run up in the private lift to the A.P. station, where there was a strong cell ready to receive them. Then I was free to show my colleague, himself an expert airman, the wonders of our capture. I was doing this—we were in the pilot's cabin—when one of my men came in and said that a motor-launch had come alongside from the private air-yacht *May Flower*, which was moored not a hundred yards away. I had noticed when descending that a magnificent yacht was close by, but I did not identify it as Mr. Van Adam's ship. It appeared that he had been sleeping aboard for the last two or three nights since he had flown down from London for the funeral, and was now alongside.

Van Adams of course was an exception to all ordinary rules, and in a minute he was shaking hands in the private saloon and betraying a most lively curiosity as to our adventures. I put Danjuro to satisfy him, and when we had discussed a bottle of Helzephron's champaigne I left a couple of trusted men to guard the ship and went ashore. Danjuro returned to the *May Flower* with his patron.

The rest of the day was a whirl of business and excitement, though I managed to get three hours much needed sleep in the afternoon.

Wires from the Government, from America, from royalty, poured in in a never ceasing stream. There were innumerable officials to see, the correspondents of the great newspapers to satisfy with some sort of story—a hundred things to do and arrange for.

The whole of England was in a ferment, and the stone building of the Air Police on the Hoe was for a few hours the center of it all. The air was thick with patrol ships warning off aviators of all kinds from approaching the Pirate Ship, which lay at rest and harmless by the north wall of the pool.

Just before I retired to rest the news of what was called "The Battle of the Moor" began to come through. The pirates, seeing their ship gone, had rushed up again into the house and had held it with the courage of desperation. Only three of them had survived, and they were now locked up in the police-station at Penzance.

It would take many pages to detail the events of that crowded day, which did not end for me until ten o'clock at night, for I was forced to attend a congratulatory dinner at the Royal. Previous to that I had found it necessary to summon Danjuro from the *May Flower*, where he had remained quietly with Mr. Van Adams during the day. It was necessary that I should be restored to something like my former self, and only Danjuro could make me blond again! My mustache—alas—he could not restore.

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I had arranged to sleep at the station, where there were several bedrooms, and about ten-thirty I passed the sentry and entered the grounds.

Plymouth was now quiet. It was a hot, dark night with neither moon nor stars. During the day the weather had changed, and now thunder muttered far away at sea and amethyst sheet-lightning flickered upon the horizon.

Now and again a drop of hot rain fell.

CHAPTER XIX

LAST FLIGHT OF THE PIRATE AIR-SHIP

THE station superintendent met me in the office, which was brilliantly lit and cooled by an electric fan.

"I expect you're feeling pretty well done, Sir John," he said.

"I feel pretty tired, Johnson, I own."

"There's a big thunder-storm coming up, not a doubt of it. The air'll be cooler afterward. All the arrangements about the prisoners are made, sir."

The staff had been in communication with London all day upon this matter, but I had not heard the result. I inquired from the superintendent now.

"Our two birds, Sir John, and the three they've got at Penzance are to travel to London tonight. They'll be brought up at Bow Street for a minute or two, and remanded for a week to suit your convenience. The Home Office will communicate with you, sir."

"Very well. How are they going?"

"The night mail-train leaves Penzance at twelve, and gets here at two. The other three will be on board and well guarded. Our prisoners will join the train at Mill Bay Station. I've detailed Prosser and Moore to escort them.'

"See that the men are well armed. How are the prisoners?"

"Very quiet, sir. They seem to realize that it's all up with them. They've taken their food all right."

"They are both together?"

"Yes, Sir John. You see, we've only the one cell that is absolutely safe. But that can't make any difference. A man looks in every half-hour. They can't hear him coming, and he reports that they don't even talk."

"They're not handcuffed?"

"No; I didn't think it necessary, sir. They will be, and chained together, too, when they leave for the train. We searched them thoroughly and took everything they had on them away half an hour after they were brought in. Would you like to see them, sir?"

"I don't think so, Johnson. I've been a good deal too much in their society during the last day or two. I don't want to look at that Vargus again until he's in the dock and I'm giving evidence against him."

"He's a wicked-looking customer if ever I saw one," said the inspector with a face of disgust. "Well, good night, sir, and I hope you'll sleep well. I've told the station attendant to have your bath ready at eight. He'll call you then."

The good Johnson went away, and I was left alone. My head ached, and I felt disinclined for sleep at once. I undressed, however, and sat in pajamas as I smoked a final pipe. There was whisky, soda and a bowl of ice, and I took a peg.

I felt singularly low and dispirited. It was I supposed, the inevitable reaction of the nerves after all I had endured, combined with the heavy pressure of the atmosphere and the electric tension of the storm.

At any rate I remember feeling—as every one does at times—that the greatest triumphs and successes were worth very little after all when once they were achieved. There is bitterness at the bottom of every cup—*surgit amari aliquid*—and life was a poor thing at best. And I fell to reflecting on the evil and misery that can be wrought by one man.

The gaunt specter of Hawk Helzephron haunted my mind, and the long row of dead men that must be laid to his account, the brave fellows of my own service, the Transatlantic people—to say nothing of the black scoundrels that he had made and tempted, who had been hurried into eternity with their crimes unrepented.

It was a morbid train of thought, but I was worn out, and the dark hour had its way with me until I thought of Connie and her merciful preservation from harm; my own rescue. Then, rather ashamed of myself, I made an effort to banish these gloomy imaginings, said my prayers and got into bed.

All the same, as I fell asleep the stammer of the approaching thunder and the white glare of lightning, which now and then flashed into the darkened room, seemed like the growling of those awful dogs and the glare of the advancing air-ship in the cave.

I think now that I must have had some unconscious premonition of the tragedy which was racing toward me all the time.

I WAS awakened sharply and suddenly, at first I thought by a flash of lightning. But it was not so. The electrics had been suddenly turned on, and there were men in uniform round my bed.

The wind had risen and was whistling outside. A deluge of thunder-rain was in progress, and great sheets of water were flung against the window.

I saw Superintendent Johnson. His face was white as linen.

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"What is it?" I shouted.

He shouted in answer, and I heard his voice above the tumult of the storm.

"The prisoners, Sir John," he wailed. "They've got away. They picked the lock of the cell somehow, got into the passage and broke the bars of the window at the end. We none of us heard a sound!"

I leaped out of bed and began to bellow orders for pursuit—until I saw Johnson's terrified face again, and knew that I had not heard all.

"They got down to the water somehow, sir. They must have climbed down the lift rails. And they swam to the ship."

"Good ——! What ship?"

"Their own ship, Sir John. Somehow or other they managed to get on board; we've just heard——"

"Where are they?"

"They did for the two men on board and must have managed to start the engines—the ship's gone. The searchlights are all over the pool, and there's no trace of her. They were seen, Sir John; I——"

He broke off short, the words drying up in his mouth. All the other men shrank together in a frightened group as Danjuro came slowly into the room.

I have never seen a figure so awe-inspiring or terrible.

In moments of supreme emotion a European grows chalk-white, an Asiatic gray.

The Japanese was livid gray now, and his face seemed carved with fantastic gashes—gray rubber slashed with a knife. He was like a man who had slept a thousand years and wakened to find himself old, and in hell.

He came slowly up to me, moving like a thing on wheels drawn by a cord, and when he was close he spoke.

I can never recall his voice without an almost physical state of fear. Suppose that you could go with Dante to that gate over which is written, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." And suppose, as you stood there and listened, you heard a well-known voice far down, saying—

"I am tormented in this flame. . . ."

Well, Danjuro's voice was like that.

"During a lull in the storm," he said as if repeating a lesson, "I went up on the deck of the *May Flower* for a breath of air. Mr. Van Adams accompanied me. We were looking over the water to the Pirate Ship when I saw lights flashing up and down through the port-holes of the fusilage.

"It struck me as strange. We wondered what the two men in charge could be doing.

"As we watched we were just able to distinguish two men coming up on deck. Then there came a vivid flash of lightning, and I saw everything plainly. The two men were Vargus and Gascoigne, and they were carrying the body of a man in uniform, which they lowered into the water."

Inspector Johnson gave a quick gasp. Danjuro continued:

"Without a moment's delay I got a couple of pistols, and Mr. Van Adams and I jumped into the electric launch, which was moored alongside the *May Flower*, though on the other side to that which faced the pirate. There was no time to summon help. We shot out into the pool just as the storm began again with thunder-claps and a deluge of water.

"We were within a few yards of the ship and making ready to board her when Mr. Van Adams flashed a powerful electric torch, and I saw Vargus with a knife in his hand hacking at the mooring-ropes. At the same time I noticed that the lights in the pilot's cabin had been turned on.

"I took a snap-shot at Vargus and missed him. Almost simultaneously he fired directly at the light of the torch which Mr. Van Adams held. The bullet went through Mr. Van Adams' heart, and he fell back dead in my arms—I was steering the launch.

"I fired off all the cartridges in my pistol, but the thunder drowned the noise. The Pirate Ship began to move. I saw the lights in her side moving along—and then she lifted and disappeared."

The awful voice ceased, and all of us in that room stood like waxen figures in a show.

FOR three days the press and public were kept in entire ignorance of what had happened during the storm.

Upon the fourth, just as I was beginning to think that all my measures were in vain and that the Pirate Ship had vanished utterly, the Head Officer in Whitehall received two long telegrams from the prefect of Finistèrre in France and the chief of police of Quimper, the old cathedral city in Brittany.

On one of the wild and lonely Breton moors a goat-herd had discovered the wreckage of a large air-ship. By it was the body of a young man, but only one body. The telegrams urgently asked me to come over at once.

I did so in my fastest patrol boat. Lying in a wild wilderness of gorse and heather were the remains of the Pirate Ship. It had been destroyed beyond possibility of reconstruction, and destroyed methodically and deliberately while at rest upon the ground. There was no doubt about that.

The body I afterward saw in the Morgue at Quimper was that of Gascoigne. He had not met his death by any accidental means, but had been stabbed in the back.

He must have been dead for quite two days before the goat-herd made his discovery, and of Vargus, living or dead, there was not a trace.

I was back in London again that night, and

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just as I was going to bed in Half Moon Street the bell of the flat rang. Thumbwood went to the door and announced that Mr. Danjuro wished to see me.

He was in evening dress, and quite his old self again to outward appearances except that his black hair had turned an iron gray.

For a moment or two we discussed details of the inquest that had been held in chambers upon poor Van Adams, arrangements made for the trial of the three surviving pirates, and so on. Then I told him what I had seen at Quimper.

"Mr. Muir Lockhart told me of the telegrams from France," he said. "I called at Whitehall, but you had already started for Quimper, Sir John. I must apologize for such a late call, but I was anxious to hear your news. Now I see my way clear."

"I suppose, after your great loss, you will go back to America, or perhaps Japan, and settle down?"

He shook his head.

"You know," I continued, "that if you cared for it, there is a highly paid and important position open to you with the Air Police? Nothing would give me greater pleasure, as you know, than to have you as a colleague."

"I thank you, Sir John, but I have other work to do. I am a rich man, but that only interests me inasmuch as it is a means to an end. When that end is reached——"

He made a curious gesture with his arm, which I did not understand.

"May I ask what your work is?"

He looked at me with surprize.

"Vargus is still alive," he said simply.

"He will be caught soon. The police of the world are looking for him, if he is alive."

"I think it will be a long pursuit, Sir John. He has got off with the treasure, and I know one or two things about him which are not generally known. I do not think that Mr. Vargus will fall into the hands of the police."

"Then you ——"

"It is my work. I owe the spirit of my patron this man's blood, and I shall pay the debt. Were he to hide in the depths of the sea, sooner or later I should find him. There is no power strong enough in life to keep us two apart."

He had dropped his voice. The words hissed like a knife upon a strop.

"I wish you good luck," I said at length, and was about to say more, to express my gratitude again, when he cut me short.

"I am leaving for Paris in half an hour," he said, "and must bid you farewell, Sir John. Convey my humble compliments to Miss Shepherd," and with a low bow and a frigid handshake he was gone.

Six weeks afterward, on the day before my wedding, I received a magnificent Japanese vase of the old Satsuma enamel, but the card enclosed bore no address.

I did not see this extraordinary being again for nearly two years. Of that meeting I shall write in the following short epilogue.

EPILOGUE

IN THE Winter of 19— I was at Monte Carlo for three weeks, taking a short holiday alone, and also looking out for a villa at Roquebrune or Mentone for my wife, who was to come out with the baby as soon as the house had been secured.

Now and again I went into the "Rooms" and staked a louis or two upon an even chance or a *transversale* at roulette; but speaking generally the Casino bored me. The cosmopolitan crowd of smart people—like champagne corks floating on a cesspool—the professional gamblers, with their veil of decorous indifference concealing a fierce greed for money which they had not earned—a sprinkling of wood-ash over a glowing fire—presented little interest, and I much preferred long walks and drives in the earthly paradise of the Maritime Alps.

I stayed at the Métropole Hotel, making it the base of my excursions, and one evening after dinner I paid one of my rare visits to the Casino. I wandered about the gilded, stuffy saloons with their illuminations of oil-lamps—so that no enterprising gentleman may cut the electric wires and make off with the money on the tables!—the low voices and almost sanctimonious manner of the players, the overdressed demi-mondaines who glide about with their hard, evil eyes.

The place was very full. All the chairs round the roulette tables were occupied, and people were standing behind the chairs as well. As I am tall, I was able to reach over and place my stakes, and I did so several times.

When I had lost four louis with monotonous regularity I decided that it was not worth while, and thought I would go and smoke; for, contrary to the usual pictures in the magazines, smoking is not allowed in the roulette or trente-et-quarante rooms.

So I went out into the Atrium, the great pillared entrance hall, which looks like an important provincial corn exchange, and lit a cigaret. The place was fairly full of people walking up and down or reading the latest telegrams, which are fixed up upon a green-baize screen, and I was watching them idly when, coming round the corner from the cloak-room, I saw—Danjuro!

My heart gave a sudden leap, the sight of him was so utterly unexpected and recalled so much. To tell the truth he seemed to belong to a long-past and forgotten dream, for Connie and I by mutual consent hardly ever spoke of the days of the pirates.

Danjuro was about fifteen yards away. I

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saw his face distinctly, and was certain that I was not mistaken. Then he looked up, and I could swear that he saw and recognized me.

Be that as it may, he turned and slipped round the corner like a weasel, and when I got there he had vanished. I made a search of course, though I knew how futile it would be if he wished to avoid me, and the result was as I expected. There wasn't a trace of him anywhere, and none of the attendants or doorkeepers had seen a Japanese gentleman anywhere.

I went for a walk on the terrace in the moonlight, and then returned to the hotel and sought my bed. For a long time I could not sleep. The sight of Danjuro had made me restless. A legion of memories trooped through the brain, and curiosity marshaled the procession.

What was that enigmatic and sinister being doing here? Was he still upon his ruthless quest, moving through the panorama of European life like some *Wandering Jew* of vengeance?

Nothing had ever been heard of Vargus again. For my part, I shared the opinion of the police bureaus of the Continent, that the soft-voiced and malignant scoundrel was dead.

It was pathetic to think of Danjuro prowling through life to avenge his patron, wasting his magnificent powers upon a hopeless quest. Pathetic, yes—so ran my thoughts—but one can't think of Danjuro as an ordinary human being. He was simply a single idea clothed in flesh, a marvelous machine designed for one operation only, a specialist so perfect that he became a monomaniac.

Poor Van Adams; to protect and serve him had been Danjuro's whole life. Every faculty of mind and body had been devoted to that one end.

And yet he must have loved the American to have served him so. And if he could love he was human!

I wrestled with the problem till dawn, and got no nearer a solution. I knew that despite our companionship in peril and the extraordinary adventures we had gone through together, if Van Adams had lived and for any reason had told Danjuro to put me out of the way the little man would have executed the job with neatness, dispatch and an entire absence of compunction.

I decided that Danjuro as a subject of psychological analysis was quite beyond me, and did my best to forget the incident. With an effort I managed to do so, and got a few hours' sleep before Thumbwood called me.

I said nothing to him of having seen Danjuro for he also is unwilling to talk much of the days of terror, perhaps because his wife—Wilson, that was, and is still, Connie's handmaid—so strenuously objects to it.

About half-past eleven I left the hotel and strolled to the foot of the funicular railway which hauls one up from the narrow ledge of land on which Monte Carlo stands to the heights of La Turbie. I designed to lunch at the excellent hotel at the top in the clear mountain air, and then to walk along the Upper Corniche toward Roquebrune, Eze, and the mountains above Mentone.

There is much to explore in these high regions —ruins of Roman and medieval forts, built as a defense against the raiding Moors of the Mediterranean, and here and there delightful villas among pine-woods and olive-groves, far from the haunts of men.

It was a house of this description, a mountain hermitage, that I wished to find and take for six months. I knew that they were occasionally to be let, but somewhat difficult to come across upon the books of the agents. In Monte Carlo I had been assured that personal exploration was the best and quickest way.

I LUNCHED at La Turbie on a magnificent *bouillabaisse* and *riz-de-veau*, and after an interval set out upon my walk. It was a magnificent afternoon, the air golden clear.

Far away out to sea Corsica lay like a dim cloud. The mountainside fell in terrace after terrace of olives to groups of painted houses looking like toys. Away to the right were the red roofs and gleaming white buildings of the Monte Carlo palaces, and the promontory of the Tête du Chien was perfectly outlined in the azure of the sea.

"Yes," I thought; "upon this great height is the place to live when one comes to the Côte d'Azur, and I won't go home tonight until I have found something."

And I began to climb by a by-path.

The afternoon was hot. After a mile or two I rested in the shade of a great rock and fell asleep. When I awoke the sun, which sets early in Winter, even on the Riviera, was declining.

I was not quite sure of my direction, but thought that I could make Roquebrune by an oblique path over the spur of the mountain, and from there easily descend to Cap Martin and get a carriage and take the tram which crawls along the cliff to Monte Carlo. So I set out.

The path however did not prove to be the right one, and it was twilight, or that extremely short interval which does duty for it in the South, before I came to three or four stone huts fronting a plateau with an enclosure full of goats. I explained my predicament to a swarthy woman who sat knitting at a door, and she gave me directions.

She also said in mingled French and Italian, for the frontier was not five miles away, that there would be a small empty villa to be let a mile onward—at least, she believed so.

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"Can you tell me the name of the owner, *madame?*" I asked.

"But no, *m'sieu.* It is a new gentleman. He has bought the villa and the larger one, which is close to it but higher up the hill. He is a scholar of some sort and lives quite alone, so he can not want the smaller house on the road. It was moreover always let in the time of the last owner, M. Visguis, of Nice."

I thanked the good dame, refused a cup of goat's milk, gave her a five-franc piece and started on my way again rejoicing. My luck was in. This mountain châlet would be just the thing, and I made up my mind to interview the recluse on my way home.

The sun sank, and night came up with a rush out of the Mediterranean. Everything was dead still. There are no birds in these solitudes, and the hum of day insects was over.

Although the moon rose almost at once and gave sufficient light to steer by, the place was eery. Immense rocks threw ashen shadows. The stone pines stood like silent sentinels, and the huge coronet of jewels—topaz against black velvet—that was Monte Carlo seemed a hundred miles away.

Following my directions, I came at length to the garden wall of a fairly large villa, painted all along the sides, with gigantic and melancholy trees, and the moonlight shed a ghostly radiance upon it. This, I knew, was the house in occupation.

The one that might be let was lower down the slope and on the other side of the road—to my right. I could just see the roof of it as I peered over the parapet.

Pushing open a wooden gate, I went up the garden path toward the Villa Turquoise—that, I had discovered, was its name. Tree-frogs were croaking round the house, but as it was Winter there were no friendly fireflies; once or twice the fans of a palm clicked with a dry, rustling noise.

It was difficult to find the door as I came up to the villa, but after a moment I saw a broad band of yellow light coming from the side and turned toward it. I walked upon the turf of a little lawn, and threaded my way between orange and pepper trees with here and there a bush of Cape gooseberries.

And up to that moment I never had a suspicion or a qualm. Indeed, I felt at peace with myself and all the world, washed and purified by the sweet Alpine air and all the loveliness my eyes had looked upon that day. Then I heard, clear, strong and sudden, a chord of music on a piano.

I stopped dead still.

Again that crash of sound, and then a smooth and mellow arpeggio as masterly fingers ran up and down the keys of a magnificent instrument.

I grew cold, suddenly and horribly cold.

I could see nothing but a long French window glowing orange with light in the dark side of the house. I had heard nothing but some chords upon a grand piano.

But in that moment, though subconsciously, I knew.

I moved forward in little automatic jerks, listening with a dreadful fear, a sick certainty. The second before I came to the window and looked inside, it began.

Played by a master hand, I heard the opening notes of the "Third Ballade" of Chopin.

Another step and, in the darkness myself, I could see into the room.

The musician was Mr. Vargus.

He had grown a little mustache, which was waxed at the ends, and a small black imperial on his chin. He was also much fatter than when I had seen him last, and he wore a smoking-jacket of purple velvet. On one finger was a diamond ring, which flashed in the lamp-light as the firm, powerful hands rose and fell.

There was a soft smile in the sly eyes as he interpreted the beautiful, fantastic music.

I am going to tell you what happened without comment or any reference whatever to my own feelings.

The melody progressed to that marvelous passage which Beardsley saw in line as a white horse ambling through a dark wood of pines, ridden by a lady in a dress of black velvet.

AT THE opening chords of the theme a door behind the player opened quietly. He heard nothing.

An awful and august figure entered.

It was Danjuro, but not the Danjuro I had ever known.

He wore a robe of yellow silk with wide kimono sleeves, and a sash of purple round his waist. Into the sash was thrust the long scabbard of an ancient Japanese sword—a scabbard of tortoise-shell and silver. His hair was differently arranged, his lips compressed into a single line. The eyes, which seemed curiously elongated, glittered like black lacquer in a high light.

He crept forward and touched Vargus on the shoulder.

The man in the velvet coat leaped up with a short, sharp cry. Then he whipped round and came face to face with Danjuro.

They remained staring into each other's eyes for several seconds.

I saw a ghostly change beginning in the pirate's face. Inch by inch something crept over it like a veil as life ebbed away. Then he fell in a crumpled heap upon the carpet.

The Japanese looked down at him without a change in his dreadful stony glare. Then he bent down and pulled the limp form out straight, turning it with its face downward. He drew the sword and lifted it high above his head.

As it gleamed I shut my eyes. . . .

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When I looked again, sick with the sickness of death itself, the figure in the yellow robe had raised both arms above its head. The sleeves had slipped away and the coils of muscle stood out upon the brown flesh.

Danjuro's lips were parted. He seemed to be speaking rapidly to something above him. His whole face was irradiated with joy, and the sword in his right hand shone like a tall flame.

He remained there for some little time. Then he lowered his arms, and, taking a square of purple silk from his breast, he cleansed the sword, and I knew what he was going to do.

He placed the jeweled hilt upon the carpet and adjusted the point at his waist, steadying the blade with his left hand. Then with a loud cry as if of exaltation he fell heavily forward.

He had gone to his own place in the way appointed to the heroes of Old Japan.

"Thees ees the Hombre"

by ROMAINE H. LOWDERMILK

ALONE sand-butte shimmering in heat-waves from the Arizona noon sun reared its flat-topped head amid the rolling ranges—a mean sentinel. Only in the wind-hollowed caves beneath its stony cap could the sun-scourged lizard find refuge from the burning sides.

Scattered stones dotted the yellowish-gray of the heap. The few stunted clumps of greasewood and mesquite clinging hopelessly to the arid sides spread their twigs—leafless; dying, yet never quite dead.

At the base of the lowly butte "Tink" Parlow, strangely rigid in the saddle, sat his stolid cow-horse. Tink had been sitting just so for quite a while peering up the rock-strewn, arid monument.

A Thing engrossed Tink's entire attention. For there, sticking out of the hot sands, was a sun-bleached handful of human ribs.

At first glance Tink thought they were human ribs; then he looked again, trying to make out they weren't. He hoped they weren't; he even tried to believe they weren't.

"Jus' bones of a stray calf or a coyote, meby," he had murmured to himself.

"Funnty place fer bones to show up, though; ain't it? Looks like somebody'd put 'em thar a-purpose."

Tink Parlow looked not only at the ostentatious bones, but he looked around—all around. Then, twisting in the saddle, he looked behind.

Only the low hills swept away before him. Far over at the Big Arroyo a lazy dust-cloud hovered where cattle plodded thirstily to water. The air was still; the sparse vegetation was gray with dust.

A big desert red ant that had prospected around the hoofs of Tink's horse presently ran up a front leg a few inches and, pursuant to established ant custom, bit it to see what should be done about it. The pony stamped briskly to rid himself of the nuisance.

Tink nearly fell out of his saddle with fright. Weakly he grabbed the horn and forced his eyes to the butte, hoping that what he dreaded to see would not be there. It was still there.

Tink dismounted with the stiff grace of the constant rider and clambered purposefully up the slope, his high boot-heels digging deep into the weathered sides, his spurs clinking against the scattered pebbles. Squatting, he thrust his hand into the sand beside the bleaching bones; fingering, groping, elbow-deep in the loose, hot sand. What he found caused him to withdraw his hand with an exclamation.

"It sure is!" he gasped; and then pausing but a moment to reinter the scattered members, he slid down the slope in a miniature avalanche of whispering sand and clicking stones.

He remounted and rode steadily away. He did not look back.

Tink Parlow's simple heart thumped alarmingly as he rode away from that place. Tink

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was scared! Murder had been committed. Evidently no man could die alone on the side of Lone Butte and then squeeze back into one of the caves and kick down enough of the cap to cover himself up.

Tink shook his head wanly. It sure was hard luck—dead men's bones cropping out of sand-buttes on his range and so near his own ranch. The thing was deplorable.

Tink very clearly remembered the flurry last Winter among the sheepmen when they learned that José Lopez, the herder, was missing. The sheepmen believed there had been foul play. Moreover, the Mexican camp-tender for José Lopez claimed to have been present at the time of the tragedy and had reported that the murder had occurred in the vicinity of the Lone Butte and that the murderer—that the murderer was a cowboy!

Tink almost choked when his memory got that far along. He hadn't heard any of the details and he didn't want to hear any, for he knew that ever since last Winter he himself had been whispered into general suspicion.

Just now cold fear, settled around his marrow at the thought of what he had found on Lone Butte, for with the ghastly secret partially revealed he actually and for the first time felt the weight of guilt. He feared to be seen coming from the place; his eyes shifted uneasily; he wondered if the missus or the kids would notice when he got home.

He held up the fingers with which he had searched out the secret of the sands and sniffed them dubiously; the faint scent of death was upon them. Absently he wiped them upon the hot, pliant leather of his chaps. Tink began, for the first time, to fear Bown Iray.

Bown Iray was vitally interested in anything that smacked of a chance to "get" some cowman of the Lone Butte ranges. Iray considered himself a sheep baron.

Already he owned many sheep and was eager for the choice Winter pastures of the Lone Butte range, long the stronghold of the cowmen. In this case he was interested in seeking evidence that would bring to justice the murderer of José Lopez, one of his trusted herders.

Bown Iray, although he had never openly accused Tink Parlow, had not during all these months allowed any opportunity to pass which promised to fix the guilt on some cowman of Lone Butte. Tink was aware of this state of affairs and felt just now that perhaps after all Iray's boast that some day he, Bown Iray, would control the Lone Butte range was not so much of a joke as the cowmen had supposed.

SHORTLY after Tink Parlow left the Butte a man, crouched on a hilltop two miles away, slung his binoculars and clambered down to a horse tethered in the gulch. Mounting in the heavy-footed manner of those unaccustomed to riding, he turned toward town.

For two months he had kept surreptitious watch upon the riders of the Lone Butte range and at last his vigil had been rewarded—the murderer had revisited the scene of his crime. The detective smiled crookedly. Here, indeed, was real evidence.

Now he would bring out men to view and witness the tracks left by Tink Parlow, who had climbed the slope to see that his gruesome secret was still hidden. They would follow the tracks to the Parlow home, down there beneath the cottonwoods in the green and shady valley but a short three miles distant. Ah, this was to be the great day for detective Newmann and Bown Iray, his employer!

JUAN BARRENTOS lounged on a craggy summit lazily watching the woolly backs of two thousand sheep bobbing in and out among the piñons below. Sheep find the grazing very good up there in the mountains during the Summer months, and Juan found nothing to disturb the placid musings of his carefree soul.

Juan Barrentos was a likable fellow anyway. Juan liked the sheep, he liked his job as herder, he liked his wages, and he liked the solitude.

"*Ai, es verdad,*" Juan nodded sleepily, shifting slightly to a more comfortable position in the shade of the great rock. "*Ai,*" he mused, though he was utterly alone, "what a wonderful country 'way off up here in Northern America, even so far north as Arizona. So far to Mexico!"

Juan could hardly remember anything about Mexico, it had been so long since he came away—fully one year; yes, to be exact, just one year. It had been in September, twelve eventful months ago, that Juan Barrentos had left Mexico unavoidably yet gladly and escaped into America, far into Arizona.

He obtained employment as a section-hand for a time. He was on this job when he was found by Bown Iray, that blessed *Americano patrone*, who, recognizing an intelligent *hombre* when he saw one, made a place for him, Juan Barrentos, in the sheep industry. Señor Iray had appointed him as *campero*, or assistant herder, to José Lopez, now deceased. So Juan had been promoted to be a herder of sheep.

True, Jaun had once been an important man in Sonora—a *rurale*, enforcing the iron rule of Diaz. But now, what with the turmoil of *revolucion*, the upstart Maderists, Villistas and what-not—why, it was so much more pleasant to rusticate in America—and safer.

Juan beat the dust from his silvered sombrero, glanced over his contented charges and settled down to rest, utterly at peace with the whole world.

That evening Juan found a visitor at his

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lonely camp. It was the Señor Bown Iray, his employer, that fine-looking *Americano*, come to Juan Barrentos's humble *campo!*

"*Buenas tardes, señor,*" intoned Juan grandly, bowing low. "Why do you come?" he continued in his native tongue, for he spoke no English.

"Good evening," replied Bown Iray, speaking in Spanish. "I have come to speak with you."

Bown Iray was brief, as befitted a man of affairs. He spoke the language of the Mexican fluently, thanks to his half-breed mother. This accomplishment, coupled with the brutal assertiveness of his Russian father, had enabled him to make rapid progress as a sheep-owner.

An American he was, however; handsome, with bronzed, regular features and trim, black mustache. No wonder Juan Barrentos—*rurale* though he was—was pleased to kowtow and talk to so imposing a chief.

Iray explained that he had come to notify Juan that his services would be required at the county seat as a witness in the important case of the State *vs.* Tinkham Parlow, who had that day been arrested and upon the testimony of one Newmann and certain other witnesses been bound by the local justice of the peace to await trail in the Superior Court, charged with murder of José Lopez, the sheep-herder.

Juan's clear eyes sparkled. He was delighted. A trip to *la ciudad*, town! *Ai, ai!* All his thoughts were of the lovely time to be had with the *señoritas*. Hah, *la cantina! Musicos!*

"*En tres dias?*"

Juan elevated his brows and pursed his lips in astonishment.

"So soon? *Beuno*, good. *Si*, when the herder arrives on the morrow to relieve him Juan Barrentos would come. *Si, oh si, señor!*"

Most assuredly he would come. Juan never forgot anything in all his life. Ever since last Winter when the good José Lopez was stricken from their band of sheep down in Lone Butte he had been cogitating the proper words to use before the magistrate. *Si*, Juan was an intelligent *hombre* and could speak much of English—many words, many, many words, such as:

"Joodge"..Keel 'im....Quar-r-rel....Cowboy.... And so on. Yes, assuredly he would be an excellent witness.

"*Ai, Ai-i-i! Dos cientos pesos. Impossible!*"

Long after Bown Iray had ridden away Juan sat, staring at his little camp-fire, the bleat and tinkle of his restless charges in his ears, pondering the wonders of a busy day.

"*Ai*, these rich *Americanos!* To give two hundred pesos, gold, besides all these wages, simply for the testifying before the joodge. *Ai, ai*, what a country!"

One other thing Juan could not comprehend: Why should such a hullaballoo be made over the killing of one sheep-herder—one *Mexicano!* Why all this flurry of the great over such a trifling matter?

To a *rurale* the killing of a dozen such was a small thing. Twenty perhaps, all at once, might occasion investigation; but one! *Un hombre!* One! And but a herder at that!

Juan shrugged expressively. It was the "*Quien sabe*"—"who knows?"—of the Mexican. The matter was dismissed.

JUAN BARRENTOS arrived at the county-seat at the time appointed and found he had become an important personage. Save for the trifling annoyance of being always accompanied by a custodian appointed by Bown Iray to keep the door of Juan's lips and to protect him from the zeal of Tink Parlow's cowboy friends, Juan had a fine time.

Juan, happy-go-lucky Juanie, the ex-*rurale* and once man of affairs in Mexican politics, with the greater part of two hundred pesos in his pockets; Juan Barrentos, all dressed up in a new suit of purple serge, patent-leather boots, brand-new sombrero, yellow gloves and all! Oh, there was nothing to it! Juan was a star.

Was it not upon his testimony that the fate of this Tink Parlow would be decided? Assuredly. And Juan delighted in his notoriety; he loved publicity; he reveled in the spotlight.

Then when the trial was commenced Juan's importance became even more intense; Juan believed firmly that he was the most consequential man in all America.

The prosecution was ready with its array of undeniable facts and charges against the accused, Tink Parlow. The defense, also, was ready with able counsel and many reputable witnesses to refute the offerings of the prosecution.

The judge too was there—and a jury, handpicked and without an idea in the bunch, though it was rumored that the long arm of the wealthy Iray could reach among them and touch certain of the number. All these were assembled to hear the words of Juan Barrentos, the single eye-witness.

With Juan on the stand the prosecution had easy sailing. Juan's story rang true in every detail. All of it had been virtually corroborated by the previous testimony of the detective, Newmann, whose statements, backed up by the testimony of numerous reputable witnesses who had been shown the tracks left by Parlow that time Newmann had seen him at the remains of José Lopez on Lone Butte, fixed the blame fairly on Tink Parlow.

The cross-examination of the attorneys for the defense could not shake nor change Juan's version one iota. The perspiring interpreter was far more excited and made many more grammatical errors than did Juan Barrentos.

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Juan's frank statement made a profound impression upon the jury.

Juan's testimony was simple. Last Winter he was employed by Bown Iray as assistant herder with José Lopez. All was well. Lopez —a Villista to be sure but not a bigoted one— was an agreeable fellow.

The work progressed nicely; they followed the sheep wherever the sheep led. Periodically they were supplied with flour, coffee, beans, rice, tobacco, ammunition and other such luxuries.

The sheep led down into the desirable Lone Butte country. Then came the tragedy.

"*Ai, ai!* The dark day!"

Juan could scarce control his emotion.

Ai, on nearing Lone Butte a *vaquero*, one *Americano*, came upon their peaceful flock and commanded them to vamoose. Lopez demurred, whereupon there was a "quar-r-rel."

Juan, not yet having mastered the English language, could not understand what went on between Lopez and the *Americano*, so he hastened to the other side of the flock to throw stones at his lagging ones and while there plainly and without doubt witnessed the murder of José Lopez by the cowboy, who, having become so enraged, drew a six-shooter from his *chaparejos* and shot José.

Immediately thereafter the cowboy began to drive the sheep away. Juan, much frightened and as yet unharmed, went also. Of Lopez he saw no more.

Juan Barrentos, true to his trust, stayed with the sheep, tending them alone until found two weeks later by his foreman, to whom he told first the account of the death of Lopez. Later he related the experience to Bown Iray, who warned him to speak of it to no man until time to testify before the proper authorities.

Juan's memory was fine; his mind agile. When confronted by the prisoner and asked whether that man, Tinkham Parlow, was the same cowboy who quarreled with and later shot José Lopez, Juan replied convincingly, proud of his mastery of English—

"Thees ees the *hombre!*"

Having this identified Tink as the murderer, the prosecution proceeded to prove that it was of a truth he and no other. Strange doings were brought to light; Tink's smallest acts were flaunted, magnified and sinister, before the court.

He had been heard to utter sweeping threats —what cowman had not?—against the invading cohorts of sheep. Tink Parlow, illiterate and primitive, had hurled his anathemas right and left whenever discussions had arisen concerning range-rights of sheep in the Lone Butte borders, and the prosecution had no difficulty in proving by the testimony of many witnesses that Tink Parlow had uttered varied threats against sheep and sheepmen in general.

Too, it was proven that at various and separate times Parlow had ridden out on the range and ordered herders to absent themselves, their burros and their flocks from the vicinity of Lone Butte. Not only this, but particular instances were cited in which he had been severely insistent upon action should the herder be loath or slow to obey.

The prosecution had gathered Tink's own acts together with every adverse act that had been done by any of the cowmen, and laid them all on to Tink Parlow's humble shoulders. To hear them tell it Tink, despite his good standing in his community, was an archfiend, worthy only of the severest penalty of the law.

Not only did the attorneys for the prosecution present many witnesses and much testimony to the jury, but they had a silent and even more compelling appeal; for with them sat the beautiful *señora*, widow of José Lopez— La Rosa, the incomparable, creator of the wonderful hats at the popular "French Milliner's," Rosa, presented each day by the prosecution as the stricken woman, "left a widow by the foul deed of Tinkham Parlow."

The bewildering widow Lopez smiled at Bown Iray, who sat at her right adding his impressive figure to the general ensemble of the prosecution; she smiled also —appealingly— through her tears at the jury-box. More often she glanced and smiled at Juan Barrentos, principal witness for the State—her champion.

THROUGHOUT the trial Tink Parlow was seemingly of the least importance. Dumbly he sat, a sorry spectacle. Dumbly he testified, tangling himself in the network of craftily fashioned questions hurled at him by the prosecution, despite the efforts of his own counsel to prevent. Tink's sole utterances in his own behalf consisted of his preliminary, "Not guilty" and the reiterated "I never done it....I don't know nothin' about it....I was ridin' 'way over towards the JY that day...."

Outside of that he fell into every trap the opposing attorneys laid for him.

True, Tink was represented by able counsel— his friends and neighbors had seen to that—and many reputable witnesses were examined to prove Tink's sterling character and his hitherto unchallenged uprightness. Evidence was offered to prove his assertion that "he was ridin' 'way over towards the JY" the day the murder was alleged to have been committed.

The range country is a vast country and a rider might go about for days without seeing a neighbor or being seen, yet cowmen were brought into court who testified they "thought *sure* Tink must have been over near the JY that day." Mrs. Parlow, Tink's wife, did her best when she stated timidly she "kinda remembered somethin' about Tink sayin' he was over

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there that day," but she crumpled, wordless, under the lashing cross-examination of the prosecution.

At this a big hopeless, helpless tear stole down Tink Parlow's rage-seamed face and he hung his head, shamed, and looked very much the criminal indeed.

Regarding Tink's presence at Lone Butte the day he was seen to climb to the spot where the remains were hidden, the defense strove to prove that it was a common thing for any range rider to stop to examine anything out of the ordinary. A scrap of paper, a cork, or a bit of rawhide often held portentous meanings.

Any other rider would have noticed just as quickly as Tink the protruding bones on the side of the butte and have stopped to investigate. Thus did the defense seek to instil into the minds of the jurymen a reasonable doubt as to whether or not Tink was the guilty one.

Too, there was the suspicion that perhaps after all no cowboy whatever was guilty. Had not this Juan Barrentos the former *rurale* been alone with the deceased? Was it not possible he had committed the crime? This and much more occupied the hours of the defense.

And, hoping to play upon the sympathies of the jurors, the defense had arranged for Mrs. Parlow to sit with her husband. The children, too—the Parlow brood—excited, scared, swallowing in gloom and fear, grouped about the defendant, offering a mute appeal for clemency.

The fourth day, the presentation of evidence completed, the counsel for both prosecution and defense argued the case again from every conceivable point and with great vehemence and length, discussing the merits and demerits of the case with an eye for their own interest. Finally the tumult of oratory quieted and the judge read his charge to the jury. This was not half so scathing as the attorneys for the prosecution had hoped, yet the defense could see no gleam of hope therein.

To Tink, sunk in depths of agonized suspense, the words of the judge were meaningless. Tink tried to search out the faces of friends in the crowd that jammed the court-room; but he couldn't seem to see anything clearly; the whole room teetered in a pink haze.

The jury filed from the room in a silence heavy with foreboding. The crowd, expecting an early verdict, for the most part remained. Tink, having given up trying to see or even think, slumped in his chair; his family cowered about him, bewildered.

The prosecution was seeing things differently. Bown Iray conversed animatedly with his attorneys. The widow Lopez haughtily surveyed the spectators through half-lowered eyelids or demurely gazed before her at a blotter upon which she was making a series of precise little dots with a pencil.

As for Juan, he fairly sparkled with suppressed gaiety. To Juan the moment was one of supreme happiness. Not since he as a *rurale* had strutted, clanking, through the streets of Guadalajara or galloped ostentatiously about his business as an officer of the Diaz régime had he known such an opportunity for self-display.

His gaze flitted about the crowded court-room; occasionally he nodded to an acquaintance or grinned openly at some charming *señorita*; for Juan, though but a few days in the city, had made many friends. The judge had retired to his chambers, and Juan even considered the possiblility of climbing over the rail and seating himself in the judge's chair.

Such an exploit appealed to Juan. He loved excitement; he craved acclamation for feats of skill or daring, even though his exploit bid fair to get him in bad with authorities. At such times Juan's pulse beat high and he lived in a fairy realm of ecstasy.

Juan's dancing eyes registered the little group about Tink, and at once they lost some of their sparkle. Juan's eyes, a moment since so gay, now fluttered hesitantly about the room, returning anon to the forlorn huddle.

Juan's mood was changing. The big thoughts of aggrandizement were gone and in their place was only a pity, a genuine flame of pity, for the little children of this striken *Americano*.

The heart of Juan Barrentos was large; for, *rurale* though he was and a hundred times a murderer for pay, he possessed a streak of whimsical genuineness that embraced the quality of pity. Juan's wicked heart could be touched by a little child in misery.

"*Que lástima!*" "What a pity!" Juan murmured.

His eyes were somber now, and he looked about the court-room slyly. His thoughts were back at his own boyhood home down in Nueva León. No such tragedy as this had ever visited the Barrentos *casa*....If it had!.. ..Strange he hadn't thought of the misery his words uttered on the witness stand might cause.

"*Ai*, those shameful words!" he thought. "Those *vergonssoos* words put into his mouth by Bown Iray!"

Suddenly Juan sat bolt upright. The light of supreme happiness again glowed in his clear eyes. It was so easy! Why should the children of this *Americano* suffer when he, Juan Barrentos, could lift the clouds from their bleak horizon? Hah, he should have both the spectacular moment and his pity!

In his eagerness to carry out his suddenly conceived plan Juan forgot all about his awe of the impressive Bown Iray; Juan forgot about the money he had received— and spent—for his testimony; Juan forgot a number of other little things as with radiant face and wildly beating heart he rose in his place and shouted in the stentorian voice he had used when, as

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a *rurale*, he had occasion to give commands—

"José Lopez!"

JUAN'S finger pointed unerringly at an unkempt Mexican who throughout the trial had hovered near the outer door. At Juan's words the Mexican tucked his shaggy black beard against the buttons of his worn jumper and earnestly attempted to worm his way out.

Lithe as a Mexican *tigre* beneath his ridiculous purple serge, Juan Barrentos leaped the low railing and bruised his way through the wondering crowd. Seizing the shrinking stranger, Juan bellowed:

"*Aqi está José Lopez! Sí, José Lopez el pastor!*"

"Here is José Lopez the sheep-herder!"

Dragging the protesting derelict, Juan made his way before the bar of justice whence the judge, wondering at the row, had returned from his chambers to his elevated place. Before him Juan ranged his man.

"Joodge," Juan blurted, throwing both arms heavenward to arrest attention of all and parrot-like chanting the few words of English that he knew. "Joodge! Thees ees the *hombre*."

Poking his thick finger solidly against the lean chest of the long-haired stranger, Juan pompously continued—

"*Sí, por Dios*; thees ees the *hombre*—José Lopez."

Proud of his mastery of English, Juan smiled broadly at the court. His cup of joy nearly overflowed when the judge addressed him kindly.

"Go on, Juan, tell me all about it."

And Juan understood! He understood "go on." Hah, he could both speak and understand English! Eagerly he continued—

"*Sí, Bown Iray, el me dio diez pesos*——"

"Bown Iray gave him ten doll'rs to kill Lopez," droned the interpreter placidly.

"—*y dos cientos*——"

"And promised to pay Juan later two hundred doll'rs to testify that a cowboy did it," continued the interpreter impassively.

"—*pero yo no creo*——" Juan went on at great length.

"But Juan had come to like Lopez," resumed the interpreter, "and didn't want to kill him, so Juan told Lopez of Iray's offer and together they went over to Campo Santos—graveyard; *sabe?*—and stole the body of old Pedro who died of the influenza, burying it on the side of Lone Butte as Iray had directed Juan to bury Lopez. Lopez agreed to remain out of sight until after this trial, when Iray was to pay Juan an additional two hundred doll'rs provided the cowboy was cinched."

"But—but me!"

Juan's captive had found his voice and cluttered the air with bombastic explanation.

"My wife, she theenk I was died. Mebby she might wan' marry sombod' else. So I come back. Nobody knows me een thees town. I em herd sheeps an' all time been out in the *monte*. Now I am come up 'ere thees t'ree-four day now an' nobod' don' say nothing. Juan, he no gimme my mon'y——"

José Lopez hesitated. Apparently he was to blame for something, though his presence was occasioned only by a pardonable concern as to his wife's welfare and a desire to participate in the moneys Juan was receiving as a result of their collaboration. He stood, bewildered.

La Rosa, flinging aside the restraining hands of counsel, sprang passionately to the side of the stammering and frowzy stranger. Throwing her shapely arms about his hairy neck, she received a brief and husbandly kiss. Unabashed, she turned to the bench and spoke evenly:

"I see it now. Juan Barrentos speaks the truth. Bown Iray would use the *rurale*, ignorant of American laws, to do what he himself was afraid to do. Bown Iray hired Juan Barrentos to—to murder my husband and lay the blame upon the innocent *Americano*. Then Bown Iray—" La Rosa stepped dramatically to the table at which Bown Iray was seated, and with her supple body tense with rage she spoke clearly— "Bown Iray would take the range—and then— *Ai Dios!*—he has said—take me."

A lithe step and she faced the court.

"Not the *Americano!* Not Juan Barrentos!" she screamed. "But Bown Iray would be the murderer of my husband!"

Running, she again clasped her disreputable mate to her incomparable bosom.

Nodding impassive approval, Juan with a sweep of his arm indicated Bown Iray.

"Thees ees the *hombre*," he said decisively.

Standing proudly with one of her shapely arms still about the unkempt shoulders of her prodigal husband and with one of his swarthy hands resting against the far side of her slender waist, La Rosa complacently awaited the storm of wrath that was to fall from the court upon the blenched Bown Iray and smiled comfortingly at Mrs. Parlow, who was just beginning to realize that her Tink was free.

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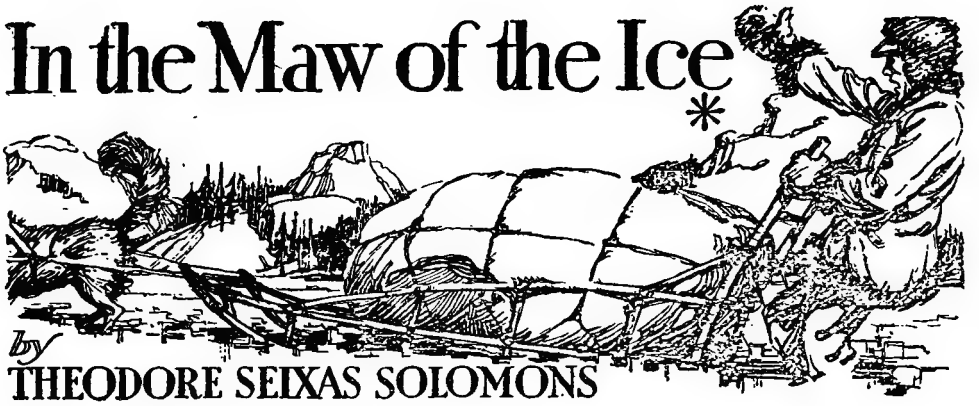
In the Maw of the Ice *



by
THEODORE SEIXAS SOLOMONS

THIS is what I saw. Of course the others saw it too—there were perhaps thirty or forty spectators in all. But when one of my partners left us two weeks later and the other one and I separated three weeks after that, I lost sight of the last of those men, and never since, even in Alaska during the ten years that I remained there, or here in the States in these last years, have I seen one of them.

But many must be living, for the average Klondiker was fairly young, and some may see this account of what happened that day and the time-dimmed picture of it will light up again in their minds, and I suppose their feelings will be much the same as mine.

I am telling it just as a happening rather than as a story, although I have no doubt that if it were set in the midst of some plot it would make a good fiction story of a rescue of the regular sort, of which I and all who see this have read hundreds.

It seems to me it would be wasting it to use it in that way because fiction material appears to be made up out of shreds of real things, sort of pieced together into a complete skeleton and then dressed in the flesh-stuff of the imagination, while this thing seems complete just as it was—not a complete story, perhaps, but a complete happening, and I am quite sure that that is all most true things are. Anyway, here it is.

Now, in order to make it vivid, I know that I ought to begin before the thing happened and describe the surroundings and especially the peculiarities of the ice. That particularly must be made very graphic.

THE place was about half-way down Lake Bennett, which is a long, narrow, deep body of water, the first large lake of the chain that forms the head of the Yukon River.

The Yukon starts just above Bennett, only a few miles from the Pacific Ocean in southeastern Alaska, at the slopes of the White and Chilcoot passes. And it flows for thousands of miles through the Yukon Territory and Alaska and enters the Pacific again.

The three of us, with our remaining horse, were sledding our big outfit down the lake to where we could find timber to build a scow for the long river-journey down to Dawson City in the Klondike.

We had established a camp in a very small unoccupied cove just around a point from a larger one, where men were whipsawing lumber and making scows and small boats; and we had returned to Bennett City, at the head of the lake, two or three times for the rest of our outfit. We possessed two or three tons in all.

The ice on the lake was getting very rotten. On that last trip, after we rounded a kind of cape and started slantwise toward the shore where our cove was, about a mile away, it was worse than ever, and it frightened us a little.

We had had some experience with freshwater ice, but not of this sort. This was quite a new thing. Long before, all the snow had melted off the surface, and the ice, exposed to a brilliant sun every day, had developed visibly the vertical planes which are formed in freezing, and which divide the crystals one from another.

Any time during the Spring if you had scraped the snow away you would have seen nothing but a solid and perfectly clear mass of ice, with maybe here and there a long, vertical crack where the mass had parted in the contraction of cold spells. Yet all the time these vertical planes were there invisibly, crossing and crisscrossing each other every four or five inches in such wise as to make hexagonal prisms. I'm almost sure they were six-sided.

Under the influence of the sun these planes gradually appeared, and as the cleavages melted a little the prisms were set free of their cohesion with each other so that they could move downward when anything pressed upon them from

* *This is an "Off-the-Trail" story. See second contents page.*

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above, or, for that matter, you could hoist a prism right up into the air—if you could grab the end of it firmly enough.

The ice-sheet was about four or five feet thick and was composed of these closely packed prisms. You will understand just what it was like if you will imagine a tiled floor whose hexagonal tiles are of glass, and instead of being an inch thick are five feet thick downward and not bound together at all, closely fitting, but just resting or floating on water.

Now that is a thick body of ice, even if it is not solid, and it takes quite a bit of pressure to shove the prisms into the lake below, but our sleds and their trailers *were* heavy, and the horse drawing them was heavy.

But one didn't realize the result except he were some distance away from the outfit, and then he saw—and it made his heart beat a little—that the horse and sleds were moving in a depression or trench which they made as they moved—and which rose again and became level after they were away. You might say that the roof of the lake was sagging to the pressure.

Well, it seemed safe enough, but we always had one of us ahead to see that we avoided any rottener patches than the main body of the ice; and moving in this way we soon got to the shore at our cove, and mighty glad we were to get there, I assure you.

During the next few days we got camp in shape and then cruised in the timber near the shore. Most of the easiest of it to obtain was already gone for the men of the larger cove next to us were well advanced with their whipsawing and boat-making.

But that didn't make any difference because each party had felled, trimmed and marked all the logs they wanted, as a precaution. However, we got enough for our needs and started erecting a saw-pit, which is a scaffolding like a cache, on which you roll up the log to be sawed and beneath which there is room enough for the lower man, while the upper man mounts the log and the two work the six-foot blade vertically like a jig-saw.

Several belated parties could be seen out on the ice those first few days, one or two coming to the big cove or touching at it. And then there was nothing. It had grown too dangerous even for the adventurous—and the reckless and foolish.

Now the thing I am going to describe begins, with respect to my observation of it, early in the afternoon of the tenth of May, 1898, which was about a week or so—my diary would tell, but it is not handy—after we brought our last load into the cove and had killed our horse and sold the meat for dog-feed.

One of us kept camp, cooked and did odd jobs and the other fellow and myself were whipsawing. I was top man, and the way our pit set I faced the lake, and I can see the whole scene as if it were yesterday.

I could draw the lines of the two coves, ours to the right, the larger one to the left of the gently-sloping hog-back under our feet that extended a thousand feet or more down to the lake. It was denuded of timber—just a slender pole or two remaining here and there—and the view of the lake from our pit on the hog-back was clear.

Both coves were shaped like crescent moons, and the beaches were yellow like the crescent moon and lay between the denuded forest, with its yellow-gray carpet of Alaska moss, and the vast, gray-blue, flat, glaring ice-lake. To right and left it stretched to our view for miles.

On the opposite shore the billowing forest rose, ridge upon low ridge, to mountain flanks still snow-covered. The sky overhead was sheer, deep blue, a little distant-seeming, as all northern skies are, and its light was intense and soft. But the lake's light was intense and hard, and yet almost palpitant.

There I was, working my torso and arms up and down exactly like the walking-beam of a ferry-boat, and with just two concerns—to conserve my muscular force—ask any one who ever whipsawed—and to follow the line snapped on the clean-hewn surface of the white-spruce log.

When the saw held true an occasional look was enough, and the rest of the time my eyes and my mind were my own; and you will guess that I knew that lake and the ghastly, still, cold, dead scintillance of it.

"HULLO," I cried, "there's a dog-team out on the lake!"

My partner, Howard, let go the handle-block of the saw under the log and turned around and stared at the lake. He was considerably older than I.

"By Jove," he said when he caught sight of it, and he studied the long speck.

It was on our right, down the lake a mile or so, a little nearer our side than the middle, and coming up the lake toward us. After a moment or two he said:

"Well, they seem to be mushing right along. I wouldn't have thought it possible." And we went on sawing.

Naturally, I kept my eyes on the growing speck whenever I was not watching the saw-kerf. In about ten minutes I could see what the outfit was.

It was an ordinary basket-sled, its load covered by a brown tarpaulin, drawn by five dogs single-file, which were driven by a man at the handle-bars behind. There was a man following him, and another man was ahead, sometimes a hundred yards or so and then again close to the sled.

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Soon I could see that they were turning a little, first one way then the other, with the man ahead sometimes dog-trotting and sometimes walking, and making gradually toward the shore.

"They're up against it!" I exclaimed, and straightened up and waited for my partner to take another squint. He stood out from under the frame and shaded his eyes with the peak of his black felt hat for a long while.

"They sure are," he said, finally; and then I looked over to the left and saw quite a number of men grouped about the beach of the big cove, and others coming out of the timber toward the shore, some walking and a few running.

Without saying anything at all to each other, Howard and I started down our trail along the hog-back, turned off it to the big cove and stopped at the back of the beach. And there I stood and saw what I saw, and I lived a long time in the next half hour or so.

The outfit on the lake were very plainly in distress. They were not a quarter of a mile from us now and only about half that distance from the nearest shore-point, but for some reason—the thought of help, perhaps—they were endeavoring to make the cove instead of trying to get directly to shore. Maybe they saw more open water there than at the cove.

Our horse and heavily loaded sleds could not have lived on those rotting crystals a minute; but their outfit was light and they were managing to keep on top. But their weight so depressed the surface that they were like a ship partly hull-down.

You couldn't see the sled at all from the bed to the runners. One of the men had high shoepacks and only the tops were visible. And of course they simply had to keep moving or they would have sunk just slowly out of sight.

It was evident that they were very tired and very terrified—or two of them were, at least, the man at the handle-bars and the man ahead. For their movements were erratic—much more so than could be accounted for by the necessity of avoiding flooded areas of ice which might conceal completely rotted spaces.

We could get some idea of the forms of the men and their dress. They wore Winter clothes—parkas and caps. I suppose they had come up the river from Dawson and were stubbornly forcing their way out to catch a boat. They were Spring-tanned almost to the color of their muskrat parkas, and were ordinary-sized men.

We couldn't gage their ages. But the one behind the man guiding the sled whom we hadn't noticed so much, but who was evidently the steadiest—suddenly we looked at him, for the runner-ahead dodged clear around the sled and talked to him, and then I saw he was darker than the others, and I heard a man near me say, "Injun." And, sure enough, he was.

Then both men ran on around in front of the sled again, but the white man stayed just beyond the dogs and the Indian went on ahead and scouted in the white man's place. It was plain as day. The man who had been running ahead, and who was evidently the leader of the party, had lost confidence in himself and turned finally to the Indian to get them out; something suddenly telling him, I suppose, that the knowledge and the instinct of the native were their only salvation. I think it likely also that he had discovered that the ice was even rottener near shore.

This, you see, is because warm water from shore rivulets melts it quicker, and also there is reflection from the sun's rays hitting the bottom and coming back and warming the ice some more. We knew that. You could see it.

THEY were not over a hundred and fifty yards out and zigzagging in toward us, with most all the cove men lining the shore and my partner and I standing where we were at the back of the narrow beach on higher ground and able to look over their heads.

On they came, weakly running for it. They were just all in, you could see—the white men particularly. They were haggard, panting, and their eyes—by now we could see their eyes—haunted with terror.

About this time there was a stir on the beach—side movements and talking, and a few ran a little way from the shore, paused uncertainly and ran back again. They seemed to feel that something was bound to happen before those fellows could get in, and wanted to help but didn't know what they could do.

I just caught these shore movements in the tail of my eye, for I was intently watching the outfit, and I thought they *might* make it. Occasionally a foot of one of the running men would sink in and he'd make a desperate scramble and pull it out again and go on.

The fellow just in front of the dogs fell once and rolled and got up out of the way of the dogs, whose tongues were out and who were straining desperately in their collars. Furry, native dogs they were, malemiutes, with a big "husky" on the wheel.

At not over sixty or seventy yards the Indian veered round a shallow pool—he was awfully leery of water and the dogs were too, as they followed his every movement. And they were all in that position, broadside to us, when the man hanging on to the handle-bars began to sink in with the back of the sled.

He tried to get out by leaning on the sled and spraddling his legs sidewise to get them up on more solid crystals, but leaning that way on the sled just pushed the stern of it deeper in, and the sled and the man hanging to it began to sink just like a ship going down stern first.

He cried out as he was sinking, and the other

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white man and the Indian turned instantly. The white man grabbed the leader by the collar and tried to pull him forward faster, hoping thus to help him pull the sled up on to the ice again. And the Indian flung himself flat down frontward, stretched out and crawled rapidly round toward the man who was sinking.

But he sank, and then the sled; and the sled pulled down that handsome husky, his plume-like tail waving gallantly over his back even while the poor brute was scrabbling at the ice with his naked paws and claws. And then the dog in front of him went, hind-part first; and then the third and fourth, with the white man hanging to the leader for a moment longer, when, feeling himself sinking—I presume—he gave himself an impetus forward by flinging the leader backward, almost somersaulting him into the open trench where the line of dogs and sled and man had gone down and were sucked under by the strong current.

The white man and the Indian were so close to that trench that they could not get away from it. The ice on which they lay—for the white man had followed the example of the Indian and had thrown himself sprawling to get a greater bearing surface—the ice broke inward, the crystals—you could see the separate ones—just noiselessly sinking. They did it very prettily—if you could have detached your mind from the men. I thought it was pretty and was horrified and angry with myself for that perception.

As the crystals kept sinking down, enlarging the trench, the men's bodies sank in slantwise, feet and legs first, for they had turned their arms and heads away from the long hole, of course, and were trying to climb up the sloping, sinking margin.

Exactly with the disappearance of the dog-team and driver there arose a real commotion on the beach in front of me; a wild commotion, whipped up, it seemed, by a feverish sense of some vague guilt. Few stood still, and most ran hither and thither for all the world like chickens when a hawk hovers, circling, overhead.

I myself had a whirr in my ears, as if the death-angel's invisible wings were fluttering close. But myself and my partner, having nothing on that beach that we could use, and knowing nothing to do anyway, just stood as if rooted there, and went on looking, while we froze—I did, at least—all over below the surface of my skin, and I worked my toes hard inside my moccasins.

I'm sure it could not have been over twenty or thirty seconds from the disappearance of the dogs before the two men on the ice were vertical in the water from their chests down. Their chests were hanging over the ice on the shore-side of the hole. Their caps were lost, their hair was wet—black hair and reddish-brown—and they still worked their arms and shoulders, first right and then left, up and over the crystals, pushing them down. It was like a treadmill, worked by the arms.

The Indian was first to perceive the futility of this and to realize—as I did afterward—that the farther out of the water they held themselves the greater was their weight on the rotten surface of the ice crystals. And he let himself go in and just held on to the edge by his elbows, raised high.

There were left of that gallant little array of dark, living, moving objects on the glare-ice only two heads and two pair of shoulders and arms on the edge of a ragged gash in the glittering, sinister mass—the gash filled to within a foot or two of the top with water of the indigo hue of depth.

I TURNED my eyes away from them as I realized that there was now to be an interlude, with these men able for some seconds or minutes—whatever it might be—to support themselves in that manner. And my vision was at once filled with a panorama of motion on the beach.

A half-finished boat was being slid into the water near shore, where the shallow ice was melted; and a man with an oar, another with a pole, a third with a shovel, were piling in and shoving clear.

An immense Swede, leader of the largest party of the cove, a Minnesota outfit, was yelling orders to men who were bringing new sawn boards from a pile set out on the sands to dry, with sticks between. They swept the sticks viciously away as they grabbed the boards, and, one after another, ran with them to a part of the beach where the melted water-space was narrow. Slopping into it, the first man heaved his board on to the dirty ice beyond, and the next, stepping on that board, threw his own just beyond it, and lying on the first board reached out and straightened the one he had thrown, so it was in line and abutting, end to end.

As he rose and turned to run back, he ran plunk into a third man running out with a board. They swore at each other, apologized, teetered around, stomach to stomach, trying to pass on the narrow board. But they couldn't, and the empty-handed man jumped lightly backward and fell in up to his knees and scrambled ashore.

The men in the boat had crossed the narrow, open pond and were shoving into the ice, the three of them, crowded in the bow and making awkward, frantic swipes into the ice in which the bow was jammed. They jabbed the crystals downward, and up they bobbed again, some upright, some on their sides where there was room. They stuck the pole down and pried sidewise on it, breaking it.

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Then they pushed back a little and tried to bunt the ice aside, and they made a foot all the time I watched them—a minute or two—and I could see they would not make another foot with four times the effort. I think they gave it up presently. I don't know; I never looked again.

The big Minnesotan was still roaring and jumping clumsily about, talking, gesticulating, when suddenly he grabbed a rope he had sent a man for and tied it to a fellow with a board. This, I think, because the man with the fourth or fifth board had slipped and nearly fallen in, and this rope was evidently to be a safety-device for the next man.

Then, after more jabbering, they evidently realized this was too slow, and they didn't have ropes enough handy, and the men would be hopelessly entangled anyhow. But they carried a few more boards out and then the passing was so dangerous and the work so slow—with four-fifths of the distance to the drowning men still unspanned—that they quit it, though the boards themselves seemed to have enough bearing surface to sustain the men.

Then they became like chickens again, some wringing their hands, some wading out in the water and standing there shivering and looking at the two men, who were still treading down crystals with their forearms.

I thought they would despair and drop down if nothing new were done, for you could see from their faces that it was only the great first law that enabled them to keep up that horrible, neck-wrenching contortion of the arms.

As my eyes roved among the shuddering, half-crazed groups about me, my heart contracting in anguish, I saw again a man who had been whittling for some time. My glance had caught him once before as he stood there calmly shaving his stick, and contemptuously passed him. Perhaps he had known the futility of what was going on on shore. But why "perhaps" about him? *He knew!*

I learned afterward that he was thought an "unpractical" man, with theories of mechanics—though he was a book-ignorant man—and was flouted accordingly in the camp-fire councils of these hard-headed boat-builders.

I saw him again because there was a stir about him. With the abandonment of the board-line scheme the Swede captain had come to him in desperation.

I could not hear the captain's quick words, but this man with the knife flung away the stick, shut up the long blade and flung his hat over his head, up the beach. He had long, unkempt locks of yellow hair, which I shall remember till my dying day. Middle-sized he was and very, very lithe—as we soon perceived.

"All right, then," I heard him reply—they called him Missou—and he wheeled on his moccasined heel, flew up the sloping beach to a cache on the bank, yanked down a small, flat Yukon sled and dragged it by its bow to the water.

"That rope—quick," he shouted. His words were like pistol reports.

"What for?" demanded the Swede, who wanted to help, but whose egotism—because he himself had tried a rope and thrown it aside—could not kill itself even in this crisis.

"Gimme 'at" growled Missou, and he leaped on the man coiling it, snatched it from him and, jumping back, laid it along the bed and tied the end to the bow of the little sled; and while tying it—without a single fumble—he cried to the men—

"Lay it straight back across the sand."

He sat on the stern of the sled sidewise and gestured further directions to the men, who sprang to the rope and began laying it out.

As they lined it straight away across the beach and up the sloping bank you could see him measuring it with his eye, his head jerking out toward the hole and then back to the beach and bank.

"Stand by with another, if it ain't long enough, and tie on the run," he shouted very distinctly, and then, spurning the ice with his foot, his sled shot out in the direction of the drowning men.

At first skeptical—naturally—of a sled, we now saw his game instantly, for he was belly-down on the rear of the sled, his legs from his hips down free and kicking at the ice with his toes.

He propelled himself forward so rapidly that the rope, as it snaked after the sled through the sand, hissed a little, and in a few moments he was nearly out to the hole.

The sled was depressed, the runners nearly buried, and it left a trail of water, but with the lower half his body on the ice, the sled easily sustained the weight of the upper half. As he maneuvered his approach to the hole, where the immersed men were battling by now with forearms only, their elbows no longer above—some one shouted hoarsely:

"The white man first!"

Missou raised his head and turned it to the beach.

"I'm color blind," he shouted back.

I couldn't catch his look, but I think he must have smiled. If so, it was the only time through the whole grim business—till the end!

I knew, and many must have known, that that Indian had returned to the dogs when the sled crashed through. Prone on the ice he had wriggled to them, swift as a lizard; though he could have bellied it to the beach, I am very sure. And Missou knew this, you had better believe.

But he was not thinking of white or dark, it was evident, but rather of how best to manage

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them. And while his sled was very slowly settling he thrust out his neck and studied them, and directly he kicked the sled sidewise, slewing it out to dry ice. He had to keep moving; it was the only way to stay on top.

The men in the water were eying him, but they both kept silent—not a word, not a whisper of pleading, Missou said afterward; just their eyes worked, blinking open and shut, flutteringly; and they were shivering every moment and their breath came hard.

His scrutiny seemed an age, but I suppose it was only a matter of five seconds before he began to pivot the sled around in order to turn the bow toward the shore. While doing this he lay entirely upon the ice and the water that oozed up, and worked his body sidewise toward the hole as close as he dared.

Then he thrust the stern at the Indian, who was nearest and who was also the heavier man. (Do you see the reason in that, too?) When he was near enough, he seized the Indian's hand and pulled it up to the rear knee of the sled.

That muscular hand clutched the little post instantly. Those fingers were used to gripping a paddle and were still so strong, in spite of the strain of ice clawing, that with them the native hauled himself up enough to grasp the opposite knee with his other hand without assistance. He had to, anyhow, for Missou could not have reached the other hand.

IMMEDIATELY, then, Missou waved and twenty men who held the rope instantly hauled in, fumbling with each other's hand-holds, their feet getting tangled in the slack. The Indian was jerked roughly out amid splintering, flying crystals.

But those paddle-hardened fingers held; and the native trailing from one side of the stern, Missou from the other, the sled came in, almost drowning them in the water that lay deep now in the outgoing track of the sled, for the beach men had not had the sense to go a bit up or down the beach so as to haul back in a new track.

Soaked and gasping, cut and bleeding from the sharp ice fragments, they were dragged to the sand and the Indian was picked up and surrounded.

The big Swede, pale, panting, and tangled in rope helped Missou to his feet who, as he stood up, wiped the blood from his cut cheek, spat blood from bruised lips and cursed the captain and all his followers. He looked like a man at the end of a long and turbulent debauch, as the quick oaths rolled from his tongue and his eye gleamed balefully. It was to get their attention, perhaps. Interpret this man as you will.

At once he shook back his long locks from his forehead and called to a man named Crabtree, a peace officer on his way to Dawson, to give him his handcuffs. Wonderingly the deputy jerked them out and flung them to him, and while they were still in the air Missou bawled for a knife, at the same time reaching in his pocket for his own and opening the blade.

The Minnesota men thought him crazy now, and the big one cried, "What de —— for?" whereupon Missou leaped at a near-by fellow and snatched his sheath-knife from his belt.

The man flinched back as if he were going to be stabbed, but the lithe one, with the knives in his hand, was back at his sled. He dragged it ten feet down to new ice and tied the rope to the stern. Then he raised his hand for silence. Surely not two minutes had elapsed since he was pulled ashore. Tattered, dripping, muddy, bloody and shivering, he stood straight and spoke coldly.

"When I give the sign this time, move the rope to a new track and don't stand and haul. Run with it across the beach, and run like the mill tail o' —— 'less you want to drown us!"

With his last word he swerved about, dropped chest down on the sled, and his arms, assisting his kicking legs, flailed the air as he plied the knives upon the billowing ice, sending the light frame scurrying like a live thing straight out to that horrible pool.

As he shot out all eyes flashed to the man in the water. The flying sled making scarcely a sound on the water-muffled ice surface, we could hear the fellow calling faintly—

"Hurry!"

Only his hands and half his head could be seen now. The hands changed slowly from crystal to crystal; in this way he had clawed out a kind of bay on the shore side of the long death trough. It was just finger muscles against moments, now.

MISSOU had reached him with incredible speed and shoved the bow toward him. The bow! How could those dying hands ever reach up and grasp, or grasping, hold the up-curved runners or the draw-bar that spanned them?

And at the instant of that alarm, Missou jerked out his handcuffs and crawled forward on the ice, and then I caught the answer—the purpose of those flashing bracelets, the purpose of the bow first!

When did he think out these changes of plan so essential for this last man who, weaker than the other, and in ice disintegrating from the strains of the first rescue, was hanging on the edge of Eternity by his finger-nails?

How precise the clicking of that mechanic's brain, how cool that mind, how warm that heart, how intrepidly strung the fibers of those nerves that energized his frame in its cunning struggle in that maw of death! All the calculation of the man was now manifest.

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On his belly, he had slithered cautiously to the bow. Their heads were not three feet apart. His right hand holding an open bracelet, he reached out with his left, grabbed one of the hands clawing the ice, jerked it up a little and snapped the cuff upon the wrist.

Then he shifted his left hand to the bow of the sled, brought his weight to bear upon it, and as he pulled it down—the body of the sled rising in the air—he got the other bracelet around the draw-bar and by the chain between forced the bow low down, quite to the ice.

His right hand clutched the wrist of the man's other hand, drew it a few inches to the other cuff and snapped it in. Thus he had him suspended by his wrists from the depressed draw-bar of the sled. The weight of the man maintained the other end of the sled in the air.

By this time Missou was working in what was like a gully sloping to the hole's edge, but unless the whole gully should cave in the slope would help, as we soon saw. For Missou crawled back to the shoreward end of the sled, reached up, grasped the rear knee, looked toward shore and nodded.

Five fleet men, with others standing by, had hold of the rope. They had learned from Missou's "cussin' out." They were cooler. The big Swede had placed them, with striding-room between them, all standing with their backs to the lake, waiting for the captain's word.

He gave it— "Go!"

At the first tightening of the rope Missou pulled down upon the sled with all the weight of his body. He had such a leverage upon the bow that the pinioned wrists shot upward quite as much as the bow itself sank among the crystals, and the sled climbed the slope and shot away.

Water spurted in the air and the outfit was plowing through, but we couldn't tell for a moment whether it was plowing out or under, for the last of that drama had been enacted upon a sinking stage.

Both men and sled were almost lost sight of in the trough of rotted ice, but the sled rode up in fifteen or twenty feet and flew swishing through the surface water in a new track as the men tore across the beach.

So intense was the zeal of the ropemen that they dragged the sled out into the sand and nearly choked Missou and the rescued man to death before they stopped. The stranger, though badly cut about the chest and abdomen, was protected from the sand by his manacled hands in front of his face, but Missou's face and eyes were full of sand, so that he could not see; but, worse, his mouth was full and he could not curse—intelligibly!

The rescued man swooned as they turned him on his back and covered him with blankets. But Missou crawled to the sled, sat upon it, shook back his drenched mane, began wiping the sand and blood from his face and mouth till he could utter one feeble muffled oath, smiled a moment—and keeled over.

The Devil in Chains

By

FARNHAM BISHOP

Author of "Ten Thousand Hectáreas," "Wood and Steel," etc.

"HOW the devil" demanded Lieutenant Goldbar, "can the Germans drop a shell on Paris from forty miles away? How can any gun carry that far?"

"As you say, *señor*—by the aid of the devil" said old Don Nicanor.

Because we were cavalry, our regiment never got to France. All we did during the Great War was the same old watchful waiting—bored to death on the Border. Nothing to do but drill, swear at the dust, read the war news and listen to Don Nicanor's stories.

He was here when we first came down in 1910, so the adjutant says, and he had been waiting patiently for Northern Mexico to settle down so that he can go home and spend his declining years in peace. In the meanwhile, he and the officers' mess have adopted each other.

He is a splendid-looking old patriarch, with

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all the manners in the world and a square-cut white beard that looks as if it had just come back from the laundry. He has an appetite for ice-cream like a twelve-year-old. Keep his plate filled, and Don Nicanor will tell story after story of his endless and incredible past.

Without a word the mess waiter placed a double portion before the Don and went out to open the second freezer, taking care to leave the door between the mess-room and kitchen open.

"How do I know, *señores,* that it is with the aid of the devil that the Germans have contrived this monstrous gun of which you speak? Because I have seen such work before. Listen, and I will tell you of the strangest cannon the world has ever seen."

IT WAS in the year 1855, when I was a boy of ten and Mexico had five presidents within four months. In our city of Santa Juana, in the State of Chihuahua, we had long ceased to pay either taxes or attention to the Federal authorities in Mexico City. For us, the world outside had almost ceased to exist. All that we needed either grazed or grew in our green valley of Santa Juana.

To protect us from bandits or revolutionists, we had organized a battalion and a squadron of national guard. Ah, how splendid they were to behold at their Saturday afternoon drill, on the shady side of the plaza! The cavalry were *vaqueros* from the ranchos of the valley, born riders, armed with long lances whose scarlet pennons fluttered above a mass of silver-braided sombreros. The infantry were citizens of the town, resplendent in green coats, long-tailed and brass-buttoned, white cross-belts, red trousers, and high shakoes of black leather. Their muskets were brightly burnished—and all had shoes.

And at their head rode the brave General Morazan, on the strongest mule in the valley.

One Saturday, as the band played and the soldiery drilled in the plaza, a stranger came to Santa Juana. He had a round pale face and his hair and mustache were the color of grass in the dry season. Before his bulging blue eyes he wore thick spectacles as if he were a school-teacher, but his back was very straight and rigid. His name was something no Christian could pronounce or remember. Learning that he was a German, we called him "El Aleman."

Bowing, stiffly, El Aleman ingratiated himself with the general after the drill. He himself, he declared, had been an officer in the army of Prussia. Of our troops he spoke highly, but hinted at a weakness in our defences.

"Have you no artillery?"

"No, *señor,* there is not a cannon in all the valley."

"But General Moreno, commanding the Federal forces at Dos Gatos, has sent to Mexico City for a battery of six-pounders. Should he obtain them and then march on this city, as he has long threatened, how could you resist him?"

This was indeed a problem. Without cannon, no invading force could hope to penetrate the strong earthworks at La Boca, the entrance to the valley. But with them, our ramparts could be battered down and our brave defenders slaughtered from afar. Unless we were willing to submit to Moreno who would pillage the whole valley under pretext of collecting the long-overdue taxes, we must obtain artillery. But where?

It was El Aleman himself who suggested a way.

"Is there not in this city an old, disused cannon-foundry?" he asked.

"*Si, señor,*" said General Morazan. "It was built in the days of the viceroys and has long since been abandoned, though the building is intact and the molds, tools and furnaces are still there. But there is no one who has the skill to use them."

El Aleman drew himself up and bowed stiffly.

"I myself am a designer and caster of cannon," he declared.

Embracing him with fervor, General Morazan proclaimed El Aleman to be our Chief of Ordnance, all present concurring. But my father, who was one of the officers present, pointed out a grave difficulty. The foundry, he reminded them, had been abandoned because of the exhaustion of the local mines. Where could we obtain sufficient iron or bronze?

Pointing across the plaza to the belfry of Santa Juana church El Aleman answered:

"Melt down that bell!"

At this, all who heard him crossed themselves and shrank away, crying: "No! No! No! Then our priest, the beloved Father Francisco, stepped forward and admonished the stranger.

"It must be, Señor Aleman, that you are ignorant of the history of that bell, or you would not have spoken as you have done. Know, then, that when the first Christian missionary came to this valley, in the days of the *Conquistadores,* he found the Indians who dwelt here pagans and idolators, worshiping the image of an evil spirit, their god of war, to whom they offered up human sacrifices. Narrowly indeed did that missionary, the fearless Fra Geronimo, escape having his living heart cut out with a copper knife and placed on the heathen altar-stone. But, instead, he prevailed and converted all the Indians of this valley to the true faith.

"Of the stones of their ancient pyramid he had his converts build the church of the Mission of Santa Juana, around which our city has since grown. And of the copper images, great and small, of the demon they had worshiped, he cast the bell. Such, indeed, was

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the origin of the foundry, where afterwards were made cannon for the king.

"But after the copper images had been melted down and mingled with the proper proportion of tin, the spirit of the defeated demon entered into the molten metal. The first and second attempts at casting were both failures. The third time Fra Geronimo threw into the melting-pot a silver chain which he had blessed with strong and holy words. By this, the demon was bound and rendered harmless so that the bell was cast clear-toned and without a flaw.

"Because of this, Señor Aleman, the bell is called *'El Diablo en Cadenas'*—the devil in chains. And lest any of his flock might relapse into heathendom and be tempted to recast the metal into the likeness of the god of war, Fra Geronimo prophesied, on his deathbed, that whosoever should cause this to be done would be the first to be sacrificed. Beware, then how you urge us to release the demon!"

"We are no longer in the Middle Ages but in the nineteeth century," replied El Aleman scornfully.

For awhile, however, there was no more talk of melting down the bell.

Then word came that the battery of six-pounders for which General Moreno had asked were actually on their way from Mexico City to Dos Gatos. As soon as they arrived, he would march against us. At this news from a source of undoubted veracity, a great clamor arose demanding that the bell be melted down and cast into a cannon for our defence.

El Aleman publicly declared: First, that he would take all responsibility and that the demon was welcome to fly away with him if it could; second, that he would make for us the most wonderful cannon in the world. By means of this gun, which he himself had invented and designed, our enemies would be totally destroyed without loss or danger to ourselves.

"Enough!" cried General Morazan. "To the belfry!"

DIRECTED by El Aleman, who was indeed a most skillful engineer, men lowered the great bell from the tower by ropes of twisted rawhide. On a sled of massive timbers it was drawn by oxen to the foundry, now all activity. Wood and charcoal were brought in profusion for the furnace. All the smiths in the valley were there. Carpenters and wheel-wrights constructed the gun-carriage. From the nearest abandoned mine, Gaspár the *arriero* brought mule-loads of iron chain to be made into cannon-balls. Gaspár, who was a merry soul, said they were for El Aleman to bind the demon with.

Thanks to the diabolical skill of its designer, at the first attempt the gun was cast without a flaw. But the very day it was finished and mounted on its carriage, a *vaquero* galloped through the valley with the word that the Federals were upon us. There was no time for practise; the new cannon must have its first trial in battle. Attached to the rear of a cart filled with powder and shot, it was drawn by many mules to the pass of La Boca.

That pass is the sole entrance to the valley of Santa Juana. The road from Dos Gatos, as it tops the crest of the mountain wall, skirts the edge of the crater of an extinct volcano. So deep is this crater that no matter how large a boulder you may roll into it, no sound of its striking bottom will ever come to your ears. It was anciently believed among the Indians that this was the mouth of the infernal regions, and therefore it is still called *La Boca del Infierno*.

The top of the extinct volcano is broad and flat. Between the edge of the crater and the steeply sloping side of the mountain lies a grassy plateau which, at one point, narrows to less than an eighth of a mile in width. There earthworks, thrown up during the war of independence, run from crater to precipice, barring the way. Those earthworks were now lined with our infantry and some of our lancers, dismounted and armed with their *escopetas*.

Before them, just out of musket shot, the forces of the Federals were drawn up on the plateau. On their right flank, next to the crater, was their cavalry; the Dragoons of Vera Cruz, in blue and orange, their polished brass helmets crested with buffaloes' tails. Then came three battalions of Indian conscripts, in sandals and dingy white, standing shoulder to shoulder and leaning upon their muskets. Finally, on the left flank, was the Federal artillery—two six-pounders. Until these had breached the earthworks and shaken the defense, General Moreno thought to keep the rest of his army out of harm's way.

But now, in the center of the earthwork, appeared a gleaming new cannon of monstrous shape and design. Or were there two cannon? Who could say? It was indeed a double-barreled gun, only the barrels, instead of being parallel with each other, came together at the breech but diverged towards the mouth so that the twin muzzles pointed in slightly different directions.

Otherwise the new piece was like every other gun of that day—smooth-bored and muzzle-loading. Under the direction of El Aleman both barrels were loaded with powder and a twelve-pound solid shot. Connecting the two cannon balls were many feet of stout iron chain which ran out of the mouths and was carefully laid along the parapet.

"Behold," said El Aleman proudly to my father and the other officers who had gathered about him. "Chain-shot—a few links between two balls shot one behind the other

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from the same barrel is an old idea, but this is new. The two cannon-balls diverge till the chain is stretched taut between them, parallel to the enemy's front; then they sweep straight ahead, bearing between them the outstretched chain. Like the blade of a giant's sword, it will cut down whole ranks, squares and columns like tufts of grass. Nothing can stand before it. With a battery of such guns Waterloo could have been won by a dozen salvos.

So El Aleman prophesied and boasted while his hearers marvelled. None suspected how meanly and treacherously he had plotted to bring about this very battle that was to be the beginning of his power and his glory. For as was later revealed, it had been El Aleman himself who had persuaded General Moreno to send for six-pounders with which to batter his way into Santa Juana. Then, coming to us, the German had used this very fact to frighten us into helping him make his monstrous gun.

Now he meant to try it on the living bodies of Moreno's close-packed hundreds as if they had been painted rings on a target. So did El Aleman imagine himself the predestined ruler of God's own world as he stood on that mountain top between the waiting devil in chains and the yawning mouth of hell.

A sergeant brought two lighted linstocks. Retaining one, he gave the other to El Aleman, who said to him—

"Remember! Both barrels must be discharged exactly at the same instant!"

"*Fuego!*" cried El Aleman.

Both linstocks fell exactly together, but the priming in one touch-hole must have burned faster than that in the other, for there was the space of a heart-beat between the two reports.

THROUGH the doubly dense cloud of smoke that hid all before him my father heard a sudden terrible screaming, the voice of hundreds in mortal terror. Beside him, El Aleman smiled a most evil smile. Then, as the smoke thinned and lifted, they saw a strange and marvelous sight.

High in the air above the shrinking Federals whirled the two conjoined cannon-balls. Had both been discharged at exactly the same instant they might have done as El Aleman had expected. Who can say? But one being in advance of the other, their flight was of the most eccentric madness.

Bound by the chain, each was distracted at every instant by the other. Now darting for the ground, now soaring to the sky, now near, now far, turning, tumbling, gleaming in the sun, with a fierce whirring sound that rang above the outcries of the two armies, they indeed resembled a maddened demon striving to break his chains.

"*El diablo! El diablo en cadenas!*" cried the Indian conscripts.

Dropping their muskets, they surged back toward the entrance to the plateau. The mules attached to the artillery caissons and limbers, as the monstrous missile whistled above them, stampeded into and through the retreating infantry. Across the plain hurtled the wrestling balls to where the Vera Cruz Dragoons were trying to hold in their plunging horses. To save themselves from being forced into the crater, the cavalry turned and galloped away to the rear. Without firing a shot or losing a man, the whole Federal army was in mad retreat.

So swiftly had all this happened that none of our men had made the slightest attempt to pursue the beaten foe, or even raised a cry of triumph, when, to their horror, their own cannon-balls turned in mid-air and came flying back upon them.

The first on our side to flee was the mule on which rode our great General Morazan. I have seen your President Taft when he met Don Porfirio on the International Bridge, but he is a smaller man than our general was. Nevertheless, the mule sped very swiftly for a few steps, when he stopped, and the general descended face downward into a thicket of chaparral. His outcries were piteous, but none stayed to succor him.

As the two cannon-balls came above the earthworks, the upper one swung suddenly downward through the full arc of the chain. Squarely on the face of the rampart it struck, tearing through with irresistible force. The air was filled with a blinding cloud of dust; clods and stones flew in all directions with great force. One struck my brave father on the buckle of his swordbelt, stretching him breathless on the ground.

When the dust settled, he saw our soldiery fleeing in one direction, the Federals in another. Besides my father, only one man was left on the field of battle. That man was El Aleman.

He had taken shelter behind a cottonwood that grew near the edge of the crater. High in the air above him hung the demon he had unchained. Down it sped for the last time. A cannon-ball passed on either side of the tree, the middle of the chain caught against the trunk. In the twinkling of an eye it had wound itself round and round the cottonwood, binding El Aleman to it, crushing his life out with its links of iron.

Snapped off like a twig, the tree-trunk was hurled over the edge of the crater, bearing El Aleman with it to the depths below.

So it was with El Aleman, *señores*, and so it will be with *los Alemanos* today. Like him, they have sold their souls to satan for the mastery of the world. And like him the demon they have loosed will turn on them and hurl them into the bottomless pit, there to lie bound a thousand years.

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L'Atlantide

A Two-Part Story ~ Conclusion

by PIERRE BENOIT

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIREFLIES

THROUGH the great open window, waves of pale moonlight surged into my room.

A slender white figure was standing beside the bed where I lay.

"You, Tanit-Zerga?" I murmured. She placed a finger on her lips.

"Sh! Yes, it is I."

I tried to raise myself up on the bed. A terrible pain seized my shoulder. The events of the afternoon came back to my poor harassed mind.

"Oh, little one, if you knew!"

"I know," she said.

I was weaker than a baby. After the overstrain of the day had come a fit of utter nervous depression. A lump rose in my throat, choking me.

"If you knew, if you only knew! Take me away, little one. Get me away from here."

"Not so loud," she whispered. "There is a white Targa on guard at the door."

"Take me away; save me," I repeated.

"That is what I came for," she said simply.

I looked at her. She no longer was wearing her beautiful red silk tunic. A plain white *haik* was wrapped about her and she had drawn one corner of it over her head.

"I want to go away, too," she said in a smothered voice. "For a long time I have wanted to go away. I want to see Gâo, the village on the bank of the river, and the blue gum-trees and the green water.

"Ever since I came here I have wanted to get away," she repeated, "but I am too little to go alone into the great Sahara. I never dared speak to the others who came here before you. They all thought only of her. But you, you wanted to kill her."

I gave a low moan.

"You are suffering," she said. "They broke your arm."

"Dislocated it, anyhow."

"Let me see."

With infinite gentleness she passed her smooth little hands over my shoulder.

"You tell me that there is a white Targa on guard before my door, Tanit-Zerga," I said. "Then how did you get in?"

"That way," she said, pointing to the window. A dark perpendicular line halved its blue opening.

"How can we escape?" I asked.

"That way," she repeated, and she pointed again at the window.

I leaned out. My feverish gaze fell upon the shadowy depths, searching for those invisible rocks, the rocks upon which little Kaine had dashed himself.

"That way!" I exclaimed, shuddering. "Why, it is two hundred feet from here to the ground."

"The rope is two hundred and fifty," she replied. "It is a good strong rope which I stole in the oasis; they used it in felling trees. It is quite new."

"Climb down that way, Tanit-Zerga? With my shoulder?"

"I will let you down," she said firmly. "Feel how strong my arms are—not that I shall rest your weight on them. But see, on each side of the window is a marble column. By twisting the rope around one of them I can let you slip down and scarcely feel your weight.

"And look," she continued, "I have made a big knot every ten feet. I can stop the rope with them every now and then, if I want to rest."

"And you?" I asked.

"When you are down I shall tie the rope to one of the columns and follow. There are the knots on which to rest if the rope cuts my hands too much. But don't be afraid: I am very agile. At Gâo, when I was just a child, I used to climb almost as high as this in the gum-trees to take the little toucans out of their nests. It is even easier to climb down."

"And when we are down how will we get out? Do you know the way through the barriers?"

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"No one knows the way through the barriers," she said, "except Cegheir-ben-Cheikh and perhaps Antinea."

"Then?"

"There are the camels of Cegheir-ben-Cheikh, those which he uses on his forays. I untethered the strongest one and led him out, just below us, and gave him lots of hay so that he will not make a sound and will be well-fed when we start."

"But—" I still protested.

She stamped her foot.

"But what? Stay if you wish, if you are afraid. I am going. I want to see Gâo once again, Gâo with its blue gum-trees and its green water."

I felt myself blushing.

"I will go, Tanit-Zerga. I would rather die of thirst in the midst of the desert than stay here. Let us start."

"Tut," she said. "Not yet."

She showed me that the dizzy descent was in brilliant moonlight.

"Not yet. We must wait. They would see us. In an hour the moon will have circled behind the mountain. That will be the time."

SHE sat silent, her *haik* wrapped completely about her dark little figure. Was she praying? Perhaps. Suddenly I no longer saw her. Darkness had crept in the window. The moon had turned.

Tanit-Zerga's hand was on my arm. She drew me toward the abyss. I tried not to tremble.

Everything below us was in shadow. In a low, firm voice Tanit-Zerga began to speak:

"Everything is ready. I have twisted the rope about the pillar. Here is the slip-knot. Put it under your arms. Take this cushion. Keep it pressed against your hurt shoulder—a leather cushion. It is tightly stuffed. Keep your face to the wall. It will protect you against the bumping and scraping."

I was now master of myself, very calm. I sat down on the sill of the window, my feet in the void. A breath of cool air from the peaks refreshed me.

I felt little Tanit-Zerga's hand in my vest pocket.

"Here is a box. I must know when you are down, so I can follow. You will open the box. There are fireflies in it; I shall see them and follow you."

She held my hand a moment.

"Now go," she murmured.

I went.

I remember only one thing about that descent: I was overcome with vexation when the rope stopped and I found myself, feet dangling, against the perfectly smooth wall.

"What is the little fool waiting for?" I said to myself. "I have been hung here for a quarter of an hour. Ah—at last! Oh, here I am stopped again."

Once or twice I thought I was reaching the ground, but it was only a projection from the rock. I had to give a quick shove with my foot. Then suddenly I found myself seated on the ground. I stretched out my hands. Bushes—a thorn pricked my finger. I was down.

Immediately I began to get nervous again.

I pulled out the cushion and slipped off the noose. With my good hand I pulled the rope, holding it out five or six feet from the face of the mountain, and put my foot on it. Then I took the little cardboard box from my pocket and opened it.

One after the other, three little luminous circles rose in the inky night. I saw them rise higher and higher against the rocky wall. Their pale rose aureoles gleamed faintly. Then, one by one, they disappeared.

"YOU are tired, *sidi* lieutenant. Let me hold the rope."

Cegheir-ben-Cheikh rose up at my side.

I looked at his tall black silhouette. I shuddered, but I did not let go of the rope on which I began to feel distant jerks.

"Give it to me," he repeated with authority, and took it from my hands.

I don't know what possessed me then. I was standing beside that great dark phantom. But what could I, with a dislocated shoulder, do against that man whose agile strength I already knew? What was there to do? I saw him buttressed against the wall, holding the rope with both hands, with both feet, with all his body, much better than I had been able to do.

There was a rustling above our heads. A little shadowy form appeared.

"There," said Cegheir-ben-Cheikh, seizing the little shadow in his powerful arms and placing her on the ground, while the rope, let slack, slapped back against the rock.

Tanit-Zerga recognized the Targa and groaned. He put his hand roughly over her mouth.

"Shut up, camel thief, wretched little fly."

He seized her arm; then he turned to me.

"Come!" he said in an imperious tone.

I obeyed. During our short walk I heard Tanit-Zerga's teeth chattering with terror.

We reached a little cave.

"Go in," said the Targa.

He lighted a torch. The red light showed a superb *mehari* peacefully chewing his cud.

"The little one is not stupid," said Cegheir-ben-Cheikh, pointing to the animal. "She knows enough to pick out the best and the strongest, but she is rattle-brained."

He held the torch nearer the camel.

"She is rattle-brained," he continued. "She only saddled him—no water, no food. At this

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hour three days from now all three of you would have been dead on the road—and on what a road!"

Tanit-Zerga's teeth no longer chattered. She was looking at the Targa with a mixture of terror and hope.

"Come here, *sidi* lieutenant," said Cegheir-ben-Cheikh, "so that I can explain to you."

When I was beside him he said:

"On each side is a skin of water. Make that water last as long as possible, for you are going to cross a terrible country. It may be that you will not find a well for three hundred miles.

"There," he went on, "in the saddle-bags are cans of preserved meat. Not many, for water is much more precious. Here also is a carbine, your carbine, *sidi*. Try not to use it except to shoot antelopes. And there is this."

He spread out a roll of paper. I saw his inscrutable face bent over it; his eyes were smiling; he looked at me.

"Once out of the enclosures, what way did you plan to go?" he asked.

"Toward Ideles, to retake the route where you met the captain and me," I said.

Cegheir-ben-Cheikh shook his head.

"I thought as much," he murmured.

Then he added coldly—

"Before sunset tomorrow you and the little one would have been caught and massacred."

"Toward the north is Ahaggar," he continued, "and all Ahaggar is under the control of Antinea. You must go south."

"Then we shall go south."

"By what route?"

"Why, by Silet and Timassau."

The Targa again shook his head.

"They will look for you on that road also," he said. "It is a good road, the road with the wells. They know that you are familiar with it. The Tuareg would not fail to wait at the wells."

"Well then?"

"Well," said Cegheir-ben-Cheikh, "you must not rejoin the road from Timassau to Timbuktu until you are four hundred miles from here toward Iferouane or, better still, at the spring of Telemsi. That is the boundary between the Tuareg of Ahaggar and the Awellimiden Tuareg."

The little voice of Tanit-Zerga broke in:

"It was the Awellimiden Tuareg who massacred my people and carried me into slavery. I do not want to pass through the country of the Awellimiden."

"Be still, miserable little fly," said Cegheir-ben-Cheikh.

Then, addressing me, he continued:

"I have said what I have said. The little one is not wrong. The Awellimiden are a savage people, but they are afraid of the French. Many of them trade with the stations north of the Niger. On the other hand they are at war with the people of Ahaggar, who will not follow you into their country.

"What I have said is said. You must rejoin the Timbuktu road near where it enters the borders of the Awellimiden. Their country is wooded and rich in springs. If you reach the springs at Telemsi, you will finish your journey beneath a canopy of blossoming mimosa. On the other hand the road from here to Telemsi is shorter than by way of Timissau. It is quite straight."

"Yes, it is direct," I said, "but in following it you have to cross the Tanezruft."

Cegheir-ben-Cheikh waved his hand impatiently.

"Cegheir-ben-Cheikh knows that," he said. "He knows what the Tanezruft is. He who has traveled over all the Sahara knows that he would shudder at crossing the Tanezruft and the Tasili from the south. He knows that the camels that wander into that country either die or become wild, for no one will risk his life to go look for them. It is the terror that hangs over that region that may save you, for you have to choose. You must run the risk of dying of thirst on the tracks of the Tanezruft, or having your throat cut along some other route.

"You can stay here," he added.

"My choice is made, Cegheir-ben-Cheikh," I announced.

"Good!" he replied, again opening out the roll of paper. "This trail begins at the second barrier of earth, to which I will lead you. It ends at Iferouane. I have marked the wells, but do not trust to them too much, for many of them are dry. Be careful not to stray from the route. If you lose it, it is death. Now mount the camel with the little one. Two make less noise than four."

We went a long way in silence. Cegheir-ben-Cheikh walked ahead and his camel followed meekly. We crossed, first a dark passage, then a deep gorge, then another passage. The entrance to each was hidden by a thick tangle of rocks and briars.

Suddenly a burning breath touched our faces. A dull reddish light filtered in through the end of the passage. The desert lay before us.

Cegheir-ben-Cheikh had stopped.

"Get down," he said.

A spring gurgled out of the rock. The Targa went to it and filled a copper cup with water.

"Drink," he said, holding it out to each of us in turn.

We obeyed.

"Drink again," he ordered. "You will save just so much of the contents of your water-skins. Now try not to be thirsty before sunset."

He looked over the saddle-girths.

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"That's all right," he murmured. "Now go. In two hours the dawn will be here. You must be out of sight."

I WAS filled with emotion at this last moment; I went to the Targa and took his hand.

"Cegheir-ben-Cheikh," I asked in a low voice, "why are you doing this?"

He stepped back and I saw his dark eyes gleam.

"Why?" he said.

"Yes, why?"

He replied with dignity:

"The Prophet permits every just man once in his lifetime to let pity take the place of duty. Cegheir-ben-Cheikh is turning this permission to the advantage of one who saved his life."

"And you are not afraid," I asked, "that I will disclose the secret of Antinea if I return among Frenchmen?"

He shook his head.

"I am not afraid of that," he said, and his voice was full of irony. "It is not to your interest that Frenchmen should know how the captain met his death."

I was horrified at this logical reply.

"Perhaps I am doing wrong," the Targa went on, "in not killing the little one, but she loves you. She will not talk. Now go. Day is coming."

I tried to press the hand of this strange rescuer, but he again drew back.

"Do not thank me. What I am doing I do to acquire merit in the eyes of God. You may be sure that I shall never do it again, neither for you nor for any one else."

I made a gesture to reassure him on that point.

"Do not protest," he said in a tone, the mockery of which still sounds in my ears. "Do not protest. What I am doing is of value to me, but not to you."

I looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Not to you, *sidi* lieutenant, not to you," his grave voice continued, "for you will come back, and when that day comes do not count on the help of Cegheir-ben-Cheikh."

"I will come back?" I asked, shuddering.

"You will come back," the Targa replied.

He was standing erect, a black statue against the wall of gray rock.

"You will come back," he repeated with emphasis. "You are fleeing now, but you are mistaken if you think that you will look at the world with the same eyes as before. Henceforth one idea will follow you everywhere you go, and in one, five, perhaps ten, years, you will pass again through the corridor through which you have just come."

"Be still, Cegheir-ben-Cheikh," said the trembling voice of Tanit-Zerga.

"Be still yourself, miserable little fly," said Cegheir-ben-Cheikh.

He sneered.

"The little one is afraid because she knows that I tell the truth. She knows the story of Lieutenant Ghiberti."

"Lieutenant Ghiberti?" I said, the perspiration standing out on my forehead.

"He was an Italian officer whom I met between Rhat and Rhadames eight years ago. He did not believe that love of Antinea could make him forget all else that life contained. He tried to escape and he succeeded. I do not know how, for I did not help him. He went back to his country, but hear what happened: Two years later, to the very day, when I was leaving the lookout, I discovered a miserable tattered creature, half-dead from hunger and fatigue, searching in vain for the entrance to the northern barrier. It was Lieutenant Ghiberti come back. He fills niche number 39 in the red marble hall."

The Targa smiled slightly.

"That is the story of Lieutenant Ghiberti which you wished to hear. But enough of this. Mount your camel."

I obeyed without saying a word. Tanit-Zerga, seated behind me, put her little arms around me. Cegheir-ben-Cheikh was still holding the bridle.

"One word more," he said, pointing to a black spot against the violet sky of the southern horizon. "You see the *gour* there; that is your way. It is eighteen miles from here. You should reach it by sunrise. Then consult your map. The next point is marked. If you do not stray from the line, you should be at the springs of Telemsi in eight days."

The camel's neck was stretched toward the dark wind coming from the south.

The Targa released the bridle with a sweep of his hand.

"Now, go."

"Thank you," I called to him, turning back in the saddle. "Thank you, Cegheir-ben-Cheikh, and farewell."

I heard his voice replying in the distance—

"*Au revoir*, Lieutenant de Saint-Avit."

CHAPTER XIX

THE TANEZRUFT

DURING the first hour of our flight the great *mehari* of Cegheir-ben-Cheikh carried us at a mad pace. We covered at least five leagues. With fixed eyes I guided the beast toward the *gour* which the Targa had pointed out, its ridge becoming higher and higher against the paling sky.

The speed caused a little breeze to whistle in our ears. Great tufts of *retem*, like fleshless skeletons, were tossed to right and left.

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I heard the voice of Tanit-Zerga whispering—

"Stop the camel."

At first I did not understand.

"Stop him," she repeated.

Her hand pulled sharply at my right arm.

I obeyed. The camel slackened his pace with very bad grace.

"Listen," she said.

At first I heard nothing; then a very slight noise, a dry rustling behind us.

"Stop the camel," Tanit-Zerga commanded. "It is not worth while to make him kneel."

A little gray creature bounded on the camel. The *mehari* set out again at his best speed.

"Let him go," said Tanit-Zerga. "Galé has jumped on."

I felt a tuft of bristly hair under my arm. The mongoos had followed our footsteps and rejoined us. I heard the quick panting of the brave little creature becoming gradually slower and slower.

"I am happy," murmured Tanit-Zerga.

CEGHEIR-BEN-CHEIKH had not been mistaken. We reached the *gour* as the sun rose. I looked back. The Atakor was nothing more than a monstrous chaos amid the night mists which trailed the dawn. It was no longer possible to pick out from among the nameless peaks the one on which Antinea was still weaving her passionate plots.

You know what the Tanezruft is—the "plain of plains," abandoned, uninhabitable, the country of hunger and thirst. We were then starting on the part of the desert which Duveyrier calls the Tasili of the south and which figures on the maps of the Minister of Public Works under this attractive title—

"Rocky plateau, without water, without vegetation, inhospitable for man and beast."

Nothing, unless parts of the Kalahari, is more frightful than this rocky desert. Cegheir-ben-Cheikh did not exaggerate in saying that no one would dream of following us into that country.

Great patches of oblivion still refused to clear away. Memories chased each other incoherently about my head. A sentence came back to me textually—

"It seemed to *Dick* that he had never, since the beginning of original darkness, done anything at all save jolt through the air." I gave a little laugh. "In the last few hours," I thought, "I have been heaping up literary situations. A while ago, a hundred feet above the ground, I was *Fabrice* of '*La Chartreuse de Parme*,' beside his Italian dungeon. Now, here on my camel, I am *Dick* of 'The Light That Failed,' crossing the desert to meet his companions in arms."

I chuckled again, then shuddered. I thought of the preceding night, of the *Orestes* of '*Andromaque*' who agreed to sacrifice *Pyrrhus*. A literary situation indeed.

Cegheir-ben-Cheikh had reckoned eight days to get to the wooded country of the Awellimiden, a forerunner of the grassy steppes of the Sudan. He well knew the worth of his beast. Tanit-Zerga had suddenly given him a name, "El Mellen"—the white one—for the magnificent *mehari* had an almost spotless coat. Once he went two days without eating, merely picking up here and there a branch of an acacia tree whose hideous white spines, four inches long, filled me with fear for our friend's esophagus.

The wells marked out by Cegheir-ben-Cheikh were indeed at the indicated spots, but we found nothing in them but a burning yellow mud. It was enough for the camel, enough so that at the end of the fifth day, thanks to prodigious self-control, we had used up only one of our two water-skins. Then we believed ourselves safe.

Near one of these muddy puddles I succeeded that day in shooting down a little straight-horned desert gazelle. Tanit-Zerga skinned the beast and we regaled ourselves with a delicious haunch. Meantime little Galé, who never ceased prying about the cracks in the rocks during our midday halts, discovered an *ourane*—a sand crocodile—five feet long, and made short work of breaking his neck. She ate so much she could not budge. It cost us a pint of water to help her digestion. We gave it with good grace, for we were happy.

Tanit-Zerga did not say so, but her joy at knowing that I was thinking no more of the woman in the gold diadem and emeralds was apparent. And really during those days I hardly thought of her. I thought only of the torrid heat to be avoided; of the water-skins which, if you wished to drink fresh water, had to be left for an hour in a cleft in the rocks; of the intense joy which seized you when you raised to your lips a leather goblet brimming with that life-saving water. I can say this with authority: That passion, spiritual or physical, is a thing for those who have eaten and drunk and rested.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The frightful heat was slackening. We had left a kind of rocky crevice where we had had a little nap. Seated on a huge rock, we were watching the reddening west.

I spread out the roll of paper on which Cegheir-ben-Cheikh had marked the stages of our journey as far as the road from the Sudan. With joy I realized again that his itinerary was exact and that I had followed it scrupulously.

"The evening of the day after tomorrow," I said, "we shall be setting out on the stage which will take us by the next dawn to the

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waters at Telemsi. Once there, we shall not have to worry any more about water."

Tanit-Zerga's eyes danced in her thin face.

"And Gâo?" she asked.

"We will be only a week from the Niger. And Cegheir-ben-Cheikh said that at Telemsi one reached a road overhung with mimosa."

"I know the mimosa," she said. "They are the little yellow balls that melt in your hand, but I like the caper-flowers better. You will come with me to Gâo. My father, Sonni-Askia, was killed, as I told you, by the Awelli-miden, but my people must have rebuilt the villages. They are used to that. You will see how you will be received."

"I will go, Tanit-Zerga, I promise you, but you also, you must promise me——"

"What? Oh, I guess. You must take me for a little fool if you believe me capable of speaking of things which might make trouble for my friend."

She looked at me as she spoke. Privation and great fatigue had chiseled the brown face where her great eyes shone. Since then I have had time to assemble the maps and compasses and to fix forever the spot where, for the first time, I understood the beauty of Tanit-Zerga's eyes.

There was a deep silence between us. It was she who broke it.

"Night is coming. We must eat so as to leave as soon as possible."

SHE stood up and went toward the rocks.

Almost immediately I heard her calling in an anguished voice that sent a chill through me.

"Come! Oh, come see!"

With a bound I was at her side.

"The camel," she murmured. "The camel."

I looked and a deadly shudder seized me.

Stretched out at full length on the other side of the rocks, his pale flanks knotted by convulsive spasms, El Mellen lay in anguish.

I need not say that we rushed to him in feverish haste. Of what El Mellen was dying, I did not know; I never have known. All camels are that way. They are at once the most enduring and the most delicate of beasts. They will travel for six months across the most frightful deserts with little food, without water, and seem only the better for it. Then one day when nothing is the matter they stretch out and give you the slip with disconcerting ease.

When Tanit-Zerga and I saw that there was nothing more to do we stood there without a word, watching his slackening spasms. When he breathed his last we felt that our life as well as his had gone.

It was Tanit-Zerga who spoke first.

"How far are we from the Sudan road?" she asked.

"We are a hundred and twenty miles from the springs of Telemsi," I replied. "We could make thirty miles by going toward Ifrouane, but the wells are not marked on that route."

"Then we must walk toward the springs of Telemsi," she said. "A hundred and twenty miles—that makes seven days?"

"Seven days at the least, Tanit-Zerga."

"How far is it to the first well?"

"Thirty-five miles."

The little girl's face contracted somewhat, but she braced up quickly.

"We must set out at once."

"Set out on foot, Tanit-Zerga?"

She stamped her foot. I marveled to see her so strong.

"We must go!" she repeated. "We are going to eat and drink and make Galé eat and drink, for we can not carry all the tins and the water-skin is so heavy that we should not get three miles if we tried to carry it. We will put a little water in one of the tins, after emptying it through a little hole. That will be enough for tonight's stage, which will be eighteen miles without water. Tomorrow we will set out for another eighteen miles and we will reach the wells marked on the paper by Cegheir-ben-Cheikh."

"Oh," I murmured sadly, "if my shoulder were only well I could carry the water-skin."

"It is as it is," said Tanit-Zerga. "You will take your carbine and two tins of meat. I shall take two more and the one filled with water. Come. We must leave in an hour if we wish to cover the eighteen miles. You know that when the sun is up the rocks are so hot we can not walk."

I leave you to imagine in what sad silence we passed that hour which we had begun so happily and confidently. Without the little girl I believe I should have seated myself upon a rock and waited. Only Galé was happy.

"We must not let her eat too much," said Tanit-Zerga. "She would not be able to follow us, and tomorrow she must work. If she catches another *ourane* it will be for us."

YOU have walked in the desert. You know how terrible the first hours of the night are. When the moon comes up, huge and yellow, a sharp dust seems to rise in suffocating clouds. You move your jaws mechanically as if to crush the dust that finds its way into your throat like fire. Then a kind of lassitude, of drowsiness, usually follows. You walk without thinking. You forget where you are walking. You remember only when you stumble. Of course you stumble often. But anyway it is bearable.

"The night is ending," you say, "and with it the march. All in all, I am less tired than at the beginning."

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The night ends but then comes the most terrible hour of all. You are perishing of thirst and shaking with cold. All the fatigue comes back at once. The horrible breeze which precedes the dawn is no comfort—quite the contrary. Every time you stumble, you say that the next misstep will be the last.

That is what people feel and say even when they know that in a few hours they will have a good rest with food and water.

I was suffering terribly. Every step jolted my poor shoulder. At one time I wanted to stop, to sit down. Then I looked at Tanit-Zerga. She was walking ahead with her eyes almost closed. Her expression was an indefinable one of mingled suffering and determination. I closed my own eyes and went on.

Such was the first stage. At dawn we stopped in a hollow in the rocks. Soon the heat forced us to rise to seek a deeper crevice. Tanit-Zerga did not eat. Instead she swallowed a little of her half-can of water. She lay drowsy all day. Galé ran about our rock, giving plaintive little cries.

I am not going to tell you about the second march. It was more horrible than anything you can imagine. I suffered all that it is humanly possible to suffer in the desert, but already I began to observe with infinite pity that my man's strength was outlasting the nervous force of my little companion. The poor child walked on without saying a word, chewing feebly one corner of her *haik* which she had drawn over her face. Galé followed.

The well toward which we were dragging ourselves was indicated on Cegheir-ben-Cheikh's paper by the one word *tissaririn*. *Tissaririn* is the plural of *tissarirt* and means "two isolated trees."

Day was dawning when I finally saw the two trees—two gum-trees. Hardly a league separated us from them. I gave a cry of joy.

"Courage, Tanit-Zerga, there is the well."

She drew her veil aside and I saw the poor anguished little face.

"So much the better," she murmured, "because otherwise——"

She could not even finish the sentence.

We finished the last half-mile almost at a run.

We already saw the hole, the opening of the well. Finally we reached it.

It was empty.

IT IS a strange sensation to be dying of thirst. At first the suffering is terrible. Then gradually it becomes less. You become partly unconscious. Ridiculous little things about your life occur to you, fly about in your brain like mosquitoes. I began to remamber my history composition for the entrance examination of Saint-Cyr, "The Campaign of Marengo." Obstinately I repeated to myself:

"I have already said that the battery unmasked by Marmont at the moment of Kellermann's charge included eighteen pieces. No, I remember now, it was only twelve pieces. I am sure it was twelve pieces."

I kept on repeating—

"Twelve pieces."

Then I fell into a sort of coma.

I was recalled from it by feeling something like a red-hot iron on my forehead. I opened my eyes. Tanit-Zerga was bending over me. It was her hand which burned so.

"Get up," she said. "We must go on."

"Go on, Tanit-Zerga! The desert is on fire. The sun is at the zenith. It is noon."

"We must go on," she repeated.

Then I saw that she was delirious.

She was standing erect. Her *haik* had fallen to the ground and little Galé, rolled up in a ball, was asleep on it.

Bareheaded, indifferent to the frightful sunlight, she kept repeating—

"We must go on."

A little sense came back to me.

"Cover your head, Tanit-Zerga. Cover your head."

"Come," she repeated, "let's go. Gâo is over there, not far away. I can feel it. I want to see Gâo again!"

I made her sit down beside me in the shadow of a rock. I realized that all strength had left her. The wave of pity that swept over me brought back my senses.

"Gâo is just over there, isn't it?" she asked.

Her gleaming eyes became imploring.

"Yes, dear little girl, Gâo is there, but you must lie down. The sun is fearful."

"Oh, Gâo, Gâo!" she repeated. "I know very well that I shall see Gâo again."

She sat up. Her fiery little hands gripped mine.

"Listen. I must tell you so you can understand how I know I shall see Gâo again."

"Tanit-Zerga, be quiet, my little girl, be quiet."

"No, I must tell you. A long time ago, on the bank of the river where there is water, at Gâo, where my father was a prince, there was— Well, one day, one feast day there came from the interior of the country an old magician dressed in skins and feathers with a mask and a pointed head-dress, with castanets, and two serpents in a bag. On the village square, where all our people formed in a circle, he danced the *boussadilla*. I was in the first row and because I had a necklace of pink tourmalin he quickly saw that I was the daughter of a chief, so he spoke to me of the past, of the great Mandingue Empire over which my grandfathers had ruled, of our enemies, the fierce Kountask, of everything and finally he said—

" 'Have no fear, little girl.' Then he said

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again: 'Do not be afraid. Evil days may be in store for you, but what does that matter? For one day you will see Gâo gleaming on the horizon, no longer a servile Gâo reduced to the rank of a little negro town, but the splendid Gâo of other days, the great capital of the country of the blacks, Gâo reborn, with its mosque of seven towers and fourteen cupolas of turquoise, with its houses with cool courts, its fountains, its watered gardens all blooming with great red and white flowers. That will be for you the hour of deliverance and of royalty.'"

Tanit-Zerga was standing up. All about us the sun blazed on the *hamada*, burning it white.

Suddenly the child stretched out her arms. She gave a terrible cry.

"Gâo! There is Gâo!"

I looked at her.

"Gâo!" she repeated. "Oh, I know it well! There are the trees and the fountains, the cupolas and the towers, the palm-trees, the great red and white flowers. Gâo——"

Indeed, along the shimmering horizon rose a fantastic city with mighty buildings that towered, tier on tier, until they formed a rainbow. Wide-eyed, we stood and watched the terrible mirage quiver feverishly before us.

"Gâo!" I cried. "Gâo!"

And almost immediately I uttered another cry, this time of sorrow and of horror. Tanit-Zerga's little hand relaxed in mine. I had just time to catch the child in my arms and hear her murmur as in a whisper—

"And then that will be the day of deliverance—the day of deliverance and of royalty."

SEVERAL hours later I took the knife with which we had skinned the desert gazelle and in the sand at the foot of the rock where Tanit-Zerga had given up her spirit I made a little hollow where she was to rest.

When everything was ready I wanted to look once more at that dear little face. Courage failed me for a moment; then I quickly drew the *haik* over the brown face and laid the body of the child in the hollow.

I had reckoned without Galé. The eyes of the mongoos had not left me during the whole time that I was about my sad duty. When she heard the first handfuls of sand fall on the *haik* she gave a sharp cry. I looked at her and saw her ready to spring, her eyes darting fire.

"Galé!" I implored, and I tried to stroke her.

She bit my hand and then leaped into the grave and began to dig, throwing the sand furiously aside.

I tried three times to chase her away. I felt that I should never finish my task and that even if I did Galé would stay there and disinter the body.

My carbine lay at my feet. A shot drew echoes from the immense empty desert. A moment later Galé also slept her last sleep, curled up, as I so often had seen her, against the neck of her mistress.

When the surface showed nothing more than a little mound of trampled sand I rose staggering and started off aimlessly into the desert toward the south.

CHAPTER XX

THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE

AT THE foot of the valley of the Mia, at the place where the jackal had cried the night Saint-Avit told me he had killed Morhange, another jackal, or perhaps the same one, howled again.

Immediately I had a feeling that this night would see the irremediable fulfilled.

We were seated that evening, as before, on the poor veranda improvised outside our dining-room. The floor was of plaster, the balustrade of twisted branches; four posts supported a thatched roof.

I have already said that from the veranda one could look far out over the desert. As he finished speaking Saint-Avit rose and stood leaning his elbows on the railing. I followed him.

"And then—" I said.

He looked at me.

"And then what? Surely you know what all the newspapers told—how in the country of the Awellimiden I was found dying of hunger and thirst by an expedition under the command of Captain Aymard and taken to Timbuktu. I was delirious for a month afterward. I have never known what I may have said during those spells of burning fever. You may be sure the officers of the Timbuktu Club did not feel it incumbent upon them to tell me. When I told them of my adventures as they are related in the report of the Morhange-Saint-Avit Expedition I could see well enough from the cold politeness with which they received my explanations that the official version which I gave them differed at certain points from the fragments which had escaped me in my delirium.

"They did not press the matter. It remains understood that Captain Morhange died from a sunstroke and that I buried him on the border of the Tarhit watercourse, three marches from Timissau. Everybody can detect that there are things missing in my story. Doubtless they guess at some mysterious drama, but proofs are another matter. Because of the impossibility of collecting them they prefer to smother what could only become a silly scandal. Now you know all the details as well as I."

"And—she?" I asked timidly.

He smiled triumphantly. It was triumph

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at having led me to think no longer of Morhange or of his crime, the triumph of feeling that he had succeeded in imbuing me with his own madness.

"Yes," he said. "She! For six years I have learned nothing more about her, but I see her; I talk with her. I am thinking now how I shall reenter her presence. I shall throw myself at her feet and say simply: 'Forgive me. I rebelled against your law. I did not know. But now I know and you see that, like Lieutenant Ghiberti, I have come back.'

"'Family, honor, country,' said old Le Mesge, 'you will forget all for her.' Old Le Mesge is a stupid man, but he speaks from experience. He knows, he who has seen broken before Antinea the wills of the fifty ghosts in the red marble hall.

"AND now will you in your turn ask me, 'What is this woman?' Do I know myself? And besides what difference does it make? What does her past and the mystery of her origin matter to me; what does it matter whether she is the true descendant of the God of the Sea and the sublime Lagides, or the daughter of a Polish drunkard and a harlot of the Marbeuf quarter?

"At the time when I was foolish enough to be jealous of Morhange these questions might have made some difference to the ridiculous self-esteem that civilized people mix up with passion. But I have held Antinea's body in my arms. I no longer wish to know any other, nor to know whether the fields are in blossom, or what will become of the human spirit.

"I do not wish to know. Or rather it is because I have too exact a vision of that future that I pretend to destroy myself in the only destiny that is worth while; a nature unfathomed and virgin, a mysterious love.

"A nature unfathomed and virgin. I must explain myself. One Winter day in a large city all streaked with the soot that falls from the black chimneys of factories and of those horrible houses in the suburbs, I attended a funeral.

"We followed the hearse in the mud. The church was new, damp and poor. Aside from two or three people, relatives struck down by a dull sorrow, every one had just one idea: To find some pretext to get away. Those who went as far as the cemetery were those who did not find an excuse. I see the gray walls and the cypresses, those trees of sun and shade, so beautiful in the country of southern France, against the low, purple hills. I see the horrible undertakers in greasy jackets and shiny top hats. I see— No, I'll stop; it's too horrible.

"Near the wall, in a remote plot, a grave had been dug in frightful, yellow, pebbly clay. It was there that they left the dead man whose name I no longer remember.

"While they were lowering the casket I looked at my hands, those hands which in that strangely lighted country had pressed the hands of Antinea. A great pity for my body seized me, a great fear of what threatened it in these cities of mud. So I said to myself, it may be that this body, this dear body, will come to such an end. No, no, my body, precious above all other treasures, I swear to you that I will spare you that ignominy; you shall not rot under a registered number in the filth of a suburban cemetery. Your brothers in love, the fifty knights of orichalc, await you, mute and grave, in the red marble hall. I shall take you back to them.

"A mysterious love. Shame to him who retails the secret of his loves. The Sahara lays its impassable barrier about Antinea; that is why the most unreasonable requirements of this woman are, in reality, more modest and chaste than your marriage will be, with its vulgar public show, the bans, the invitations and announcements.

"I think that is all I have to tell you. No, there is still one thing more. I told you a while ago about the red marble hall. South of Cherchell, to the west of the Mazafran River, on a hill which in the early morning emerges from the mists of the Mitidja, there is a mysterious stone pyramid. The natives call it 'The Tomb of the Christian.' That is where the body of Antinea's ancestress, Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, was laid to rest. Though it is placed in the path of invasions, this tomb has kept its treasure. No one has ever been able to discover the painted room where the beautiful body reposes in a glass casket.

"All that the ancestress has been able to do the descendant will be able to surpass in grim magnificence. In the center of the red marble hall, on the rock whence comes the plaint of the gloomy fountain, a platform is reserved. It is there, on an orichalc throne, with the Egyptian headdress and the golden serpent on her brow and the trident of Neptune in her hand, that the marvelous woman I have told you about will be ensconced on that day when the hundred and twenty niches hollowed out in a circle around her throne shall each have received its willing prey.

"When I left Ahaggar you remember that it was niche number 55 that was to be mine. Since then I have never stopped calculating and I conclude that it is in number 80 or 85 that I shall repose. But any calculations based upon so fragile a foundation as a woman's whim may be erroneous. That's why I am getting more and more nervous. I must hurry, I tell myself. I must hurry. "I must hurry," I repeated, as if I were in a dream.

He raised his head with an indefinable expression of joy. His hand trembled with happiness when he shook mine.

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"You will see," he repeated excitedly; "you will see."

Ecstatically he took me in his arms and held me there a long moment.

An extraordinary happiness swept over both of us while alternately laughing and crying like children we kept repeating:

"We must hurry. We must hurry."

SUDDENLY there sprang up a slight breeze that made the tufts of thatch in the roof rustle. The sky, pale lilac, grew paler still, and suddenly a great yellow rent tore it in the east. Dawn broke over the empty desert. From within the stockade came dull noises, a bugle call, the rattle of chains. The post was waking up.

For several seconds we stood there silent, our eyes fixed on the southern route by which one reaches Temassinin and Ahaggar.

A rap on the dining-room door behind us made us start.

"Come in," said André de Saint-Avit in a voice which had become suddenly hard.

The quartermaster, Chatelain, stood before us.

"What do you want of me at this hour?" Saint-Avit asked bruskly.

The non-com stood at attention.

"Excuse me, captain, but a native was discovered near the post last night by the patrol. He was not trying to hide. As soon as he had been brought here he asked to be led before the commanding officer. It was midnight and I didn't want to disturb you."

"Who is this native?"

"A Targa, captain."

"A Targa? Go get him."

Chatelain stepped aside. Escorted by one of our native soldiers, the man stood behind him.

They came out on the terrace.

The new arrival, six feet tall, was indeed a Targa. The light of dawn fell upon his blue-black cotton robes. One could see his great dark eyes flashing.

When he was opposite my companion I saw a tremor, immediately suppressed, run through both men.

They looked at each other for an instant in silence.

Then, bowing, and in a very calm voice, the Targa spoke—

"Peace be with you, Lieutenant de Saint-Avit."

In the same calm voice André answered him—

"Peace be with you, Cegheir-ben-Cheikh."

Tea Ships

By Gordon Malherbe Hillman

LINERS out from Kobé flash through the purple sea,
Racing home to Frisco with loads of "first chop" tea,
Steaming down the dim brown coast, where the ragged ranges rise
And the long cliffs leap from flashing foam against the steel-blue skies.

Liners out from Kobé with a wake of white astern
Go pounding down the purple seas as the jagged ranges turn
To malachite and opal when the scudding clouds blow fast
And the purple swells blaze silver as the tea ships stagger past.

Liners out from Nippon sweep down the windy bay,
Bulky black and glaring white against the blazing day,
Rolling down the hazy coast where the temple roofs show plain,
The straining stamping tea ships race along the purple main.

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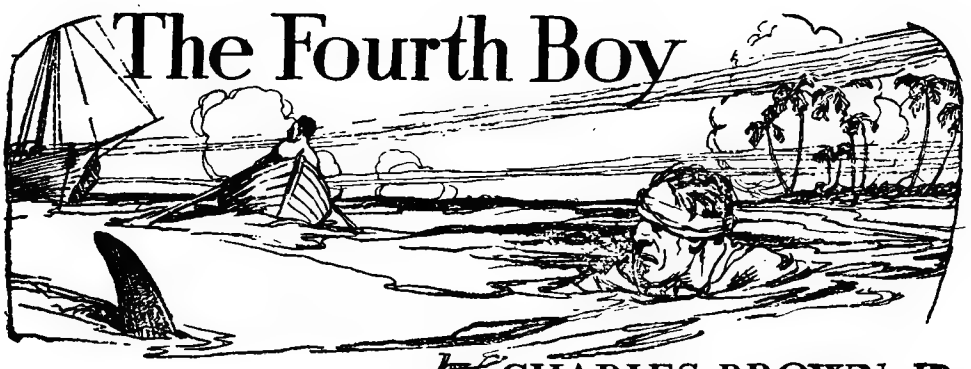
The Fourth Boy



by CHARLES BROWN, JR.

"LOGAN, you are not going to ship your one-armed Kanaka kid out of Papeete with us in the morning."

Stanton's smooth, oily voice, always exerting a mate's prerogative, came again, thick and heavy, from the little trade-room of the two-masted Tahitian schooner, the *Potii Ata*. With three boys of the brown crew he was putting away the last consignment of assorted trade goods.

"I don't want him on the *Potii Ata*," his voice hurried from among the smells of cheap cotton goods and scented soaps, broken bottles of medicine and rank Tahiti tobacco that were struggling for supremacy. "When I pulled you from the clutches of the Jew I didn't buy your native kid. Nor is the *Potii Ata* a home for crippled Kanakas what haven't an old man or woman to forage for them."

And, anxious to hurry through a very "dirty piece" of South Sea Island business, the mate concluded:

"There are four boys on our articles. That is one too many. Logan, you are going to chuck the fourth boy—the cripple."

Captain Logan, who was standing in white pajamas on deck at the head of the diminutive gang-plank which clung to the lip of Papeete's moonlit beach like a drunken sailor whose shore-leave has expired, was a patient man and mild-mannered. Some people on the *Quai du Commerce* had said that he was too mild-mannered for an island trader who had misspent twenty-five of his fifty-odd years by lying and robbing Kanakas in the fevered wastes of French Oceania.

He permitted his experienced fingers to continue the neat pandanus cigaret they were making. After which he prepared to take issue with Stanton, his mate.

But Captain Logan did not say anything. For at that moment Stanton propelled his lean, hot body from the square of yellow light that marked the trade-room entrance and stepped barefooted into the narrow lane of the deck. He was clothed only in a pair of greasy dungarees.

He had emerged from the room cautiously, stopping to listen for a second at the foot of the companionway like a gray robber-crab sneaking out of his hole.

All about the deck, Stanton remarked with eyes that were as cold and black as the big rocks on the beach, was lumber and trade-goods, burdening the *Potii Ata* almost to the water's edge. Even the deep belly of the life-boat was gorging with stuff. And on the waterward side of the schooner rails hung great bunches of red *fei*, or cooking-bananas, and green palm-leaf baskets that were near to overspilling with golden mangoes.

"The thing is plain enough to you, Logan," Stanton reiterated as a matter of emphasis. He squatted his six feet of bone and flesh on the lumber and ran a towel over his wet back and shoulders. "You are going to throw away the cripple. The beach is his place—not the *Potii Ata*."

Stanton looked from Captain Logan. When his eyes came to the forecastle head they immediately took in the Tahitian boy lying full-length on the deck as if exhausted from the weight of his flesh.

The bronze body of the boy was bare to the loins. About his middle he wore a *pareu* or loin-cloth. It was a fathom of red-and-white cotton goods like the cheap prints down in the trade-room.

The stump of the left arm attested to an encounter with a shark. Projecting beyond the flesh was the age-whitened bone.

The boy might have been fifteen or sixteen, Stanton judged.

Stanton had unquestionable monetary resources and was a Californian who had come to Papeete, the gay Tahitian capital, looking for "something easy." Now he was half-owner of the trim little fifty-five-ton schooner, the *Potii Ata* or the *Laughing Girl*. She was one of the swiftest of the schooners trading

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between Tahiti and the Paumotus Islands.

"Well?" snapped the mate impatiently, returning his gaze to Captain Logan.

"Oh, yer're clear as the lagoon, Stanton," responded Captain Logan slowly as he at last asserted himself. He began to drop his aitches and gees, as he had always done since coming out from Liverpool. And a thin tinge of sarcasm spread through his voice. "Yer're just lettin' things be as I 'ave them. Everything's all rosy on the *Potii Ata*."

The mate's lips twitched to make immediate retort. Finding nothing to say, he continued to rub himself down.

Not for very long, Captain Logan called to mind as he gave the mate time to make some sort of a reply, had Stanton been mutilating the order of things on the neat little bird-white schooner. In fact it was not quite a week—five days, to be exact—since Stanton had bought in, as he confidentially intimated one night on the crowded balcony of the *Cercle Bougainville*, Papeete's exclusive lagoon club, in order "to give Logan a second lease on himself."

CONSIDERABLY more Stanton had said that night as he supped rum-punch between his thin, communicative lips. Levis, the French Jew and theft-baron of the Society and the Paumotus Islands, with whom Captain Logan had exhausted all credit, coveted the *Potii Ata* for his own dirty, disreputable trade. Already Levis had applied for attachment papers to serve on Captain Logan. And likewise he had prepared to change the schooner's name from *Potii Ata* to *Hira*, the Tahitian god of thieves and fishermen.

But when he appeared on the beach with the papers and the paint Stanton sat on the cabin-roof as half-owner of the schooner by a two-hour-old maneuver, and boisterously laughed him back to the *Quai du Commerce*.

Of course Stanton did not once forego the opportunity to emphasize at the *Cercle Bougainville* that as a trader in those burning equatorial lands Captain Logan was as crooked as the long stems of the coconut-trees on either end of the blue lagoon. And that but for Stanton, Levis would have forced the captain on the beach.

No one contradicted Stanton. Nor had anybody imparted to him certain information about Captain Logan and the maimed boy—facts which might have changed his attitude entirely. Papeete preferred to let him ascertain this information for himself.

" 'Aven't yer anything to say about conditions on the *Potii Ata?*" asked Captain Logan.

"Only this, Logan. We're going to settle the boy affair tonight," rasped Stanton quickly. His oily voice began to rise like the river of wind that was rushing toward the blue rim of the world. "And tonight doesn't mean tomorrow morning, as it generally does in Tahiti."

Captain Logan watched Stanton shift his angry body from the lumber into the moonlight silvering the deck between the cabin-house and the rail. The mate paused to catch the rush of the wind.

"I am going to ——"

"Yer're not goin' to do anything," interrupted Captain Logan, striking a match on the rail.

Captain Logan's mahogany-brown face looked brutal in the light.

It was not a very large face, and was seared and full of cracks, like the black tarpaulin he stretched over the trade goods when the warm tropic rains were driving. Starting above the right temple was a telltale scar. Its deep, red track crossed the bridge of Captain Logan's nose and stopped abruptly beneath the left eye which had again fastened itself on Stanton.

"W'en we square off from the reef in the mornin'," the captain finished, "the boy'll be in 'is usual place. That's be'ind the wheel."

Each word was emphasized slowly and distinctly. Captain Logan intended there should be no misunderstanding. For urging immediate solution was the question of the fourth boy.

For all of three days the matter had been harassing both the boy and Captain Logan. At night it impelled them to walk the *Quai du Commerce*, as if they would find among the gorgeous, flamboyant trees arching the road with their red-gold blossoms the one happy solution.

"The boy'll be in 'is usual place," repeated Captain Logan as Stanton's spidery legs carried to the cabin roof. "That's be'ind the wheel."

He leaned his aging body against the rail and again waited for the mate to reply. Stanton glared at him and said nothing.

CAPTAIN LOGAN recalled that on the balcony of the *Cercle Bougainville* and along the *Quai du Commerce* there was any number of Europeans wagering that—

"Logan is not strong enough to ship his one-armed Kanaka boy with Stanton."

What tormented most was that even the mate had gone in on the betting, and heavily too; five hundred dollars gold, it had been rumored on the beach.

"Stanton, there's not a —— thing or person in all the South Pacific that's goin' to break in between me an' the boy," resumed Captain Logan. For once his mild manners were thrown into the lagoon. "Not all the copra or all the pearls an' shell in the Paumotus—nor Levis, the big, greasy bum."

The captain puffed hard on his cigaret. His eyes dilated with excitement while the face

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scar alternated from white to hibiscus red. As an afterthought of the "bum" he spat contemptuously in the direction of Levis' house on the *Quai du Commerce*. He concluded:

"Not even the seven thousan' Yankee dollars yer put into the *Potii Ata* can separate me an' the kid."

And then with a strong show of defiance—

"Now stuff that in yer next pipe an' smoke it slowly."

The mate cursed under his breath, savage as the expression which flitted across his face, and slid off the cabin roof. Fuming with almost an overmastering rage, he changed his dungarees for white suit and shore-walking shoes.

For a moment Logan rested his eyes, as if to relieve the overwrought optic nerves, upon the boy sitting on the deck in an attitude of unutterable despondency. Suddenly the boy turned his face. It was strained and tense, all eyes and worry, the features of a man-child weighed down and all but crushed by the blackest despair. Immediately the captain read the unvoiced question which had been with the boy since Stanton bought in.

"Mao, you're not going to let him throw me on the beach, are you?"

"*Aita Maitai*," Captain Logan's eyes telegraphed back in Tahitian, meaning "Everything'll be all right."

The boy smiled sadly and fixed his eyes on the reef flares ahead.

Again the mate was talking.

"The kid is not seaworthy with his one arm," Captain Logan heard Stanton objecting angrily across the deck as if contradicting the captain's unspoken thoughts.

"The kid's fit for any sea." Captain Logan looked at the mate squarely, steadily. "An' 'e's square as a biscuit tin."

A tired wave, burning with phosphorus and lighting the way for others that were following, ran in and registered on the brown wall of the island shore. When it had rested it rippled back to the sea again. Under the red-gold, flamboyant trees a girl laughed as she passed on her happy nocturnal love-quest. And over at the *Palais Theatre*, where "The Mutiny of the Bounty" was being run off in seven reels, a band began to play, "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles!" Captain Logan heard them all as he continued to watch his mate.

The captain was not thinking of the fifty-five tons of copra and shell waiting for them on the white, burning beaches of the far-out Dangerous Islands. Nor of the pearls they would dispose of to Ah Choy, the White Chinaman of Papeete.

This was not the time to give thought to copra and pearls, Captain Logan told himself. For now he had to do with something that was far more precious to him—with some one whom he did not want one time.

"Freddy," he called to the boy, who was leaning listlessly on the railing and gazing into the cool, blue fathoms of the lagoon as if he longed to be sinking down to its oblivion.

The mate showed surprize and his face clouded with incomprehension when the boy was addressed by the captain's own name.

"Stanton," said Captain Logan quietly when the boy, with eyes bespeaking the insatiable hunger of love, stood before them, expectant and waiting, "the three boys below can finish puttin' away the biscuits an' shoes. Wait until I get out of these pajammers. Then come over to the Bougainville Club. There're some things I ayn't told yer about—things wot're between me an' this kid.

"There was a time, too, w'en I didn't want 'im on the *Potii Ata*," he finished. "I tried to boot 'im on the beach like yer're wantin' to do. That was before 'Enry McFonald of Pendren Islan' sent me this scar at Rikeuru lagoon. The story might more than interest yer."

Then he instructed the boy in Tahitian, pressing a five-franc note into his hand:

"Freddy, get into your white clothes and run over to the *Palais*. Don't worry. I'll make everything come out all right tonight."

OF ALL the lagoon attractions in Papeete, and two weeks had been sufficient to convince Stanton that there were many, the *Cercle Bougainville* impressed the mate as the most interesting and popular. Even the Coconut Hotel, which was renowned through all the South Seas for its gay and beautiful dancing-girls of the Quays, appealed not half so much to the Californian as did the club by the blue lagoon.

The *Cercle Bougainville* was always crowded, particularly on steamer-day, with pearlers, traders, storekeepers, schooner captains and the eight or nine truthful people who inhabit Papeete. Also, it was a rendezvous for the riffraff of South Sea adventurers.

When Captain Logan and Stanton reached the club after a walk of five minutes through the tinkling layers of sugary coral on the *Quai du Commerce*, almost all of the round tables on the brilliantly lighted veranda had been taken by men in white drill. Many of them were playing poker, Stanton's black eyes noted quickly, while others were looking through the six-months-old files of the Auckland *News*.

In the billiard room two district chiefs, one of Tautira and the other from Vairao, were shooting for the annual interdistrict championship. Both in the room and on the veranda the play and the drink were running high.

Several of the players, particularly those financially interested in the fourth boy, looked up from their cards to watch the captain and his mate.

One member, fat and red-haired, who was

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drinking by himself at a table in the center of the balcony, jumped up when he saw Captain Logan and ambled down the back stairs like a frightened hippopotamus. Captain Logan cursed savagely under his breath. The man was Levis.

Espying at the far end of the balcony a small green-covered table that was not occupied, Captain Logan led Stanton to it immediately. He did not intend the *Cercle Bougainville* overhearing what he was going to tell his mate.

Between him and the boy were several things not fully known on the beach. For instance, all the details of the trade war that Henry McFonald had made on Captain Logan in the lagoon at Rikeuru Island.

"I am drinking 'Dr. Funk' tonight," said Stanton.

He dropped his stony eyes until they were on a level with the captain's sun-browned thumb on the electric service-bell which depended from the ceiling.

The mate had named a drink known to all the South Seas. If he had been asked for an analysis of Dr. Funk, Stanton would have correctly said that it is a strong mixture of absinth and limeade.

Immediately a native bar-boy in a smart white suit responded to Captain Logan's call. He came with a smile that was neither subservient nor born of generations of tip-seeking ancestors, but was for any one who was either a member or a guest of the club.

The captain included a glass of light rum punch in the order. Ordinarily he liked to sit out on the veranda with Dr. Funk, but on this occasion he preferred the lighter drink.

"It 'ave more stayin' power with it," he explained to Stanton.

And then in his mild way, lowering his voice after the bar-boy had served them and gone away to the other end of the veranda in response to a call, he said:

"My Kanaka kid 'as always been crazy about me. 'E 'as been crazy about me from the mornin' 'e first came down to the beach an' saw me on the *Potii Ata*. That was a year ago w'en the backbone of the influenza epidemic was broken.

"I WAS comin' around to myself after a spell of twenty days in the cabin of the *Potii Ata*. All them twenty days I was blin' drunk on 'ot rum an' fightin' the influenza. Kanaka blood made the crew go bathin' instead. There ayn't no more of that crew now.

"Well, when the kid saw me 'e 'ad an old guitar under 'is arm. One string was gone, an' the others were about to bust. I judged the kid was about fourteen or fifteen.

"'Captain, will yer let me be yer feedin' boy?' 'e asked in Kanaka. 'E started to come up the gang-plank of the *Potii Ata*. 'I 'aven't no more father or mother. They're dead at Tautira. They died from the black sickness.'

"Now, Stanton, I wasn't goin' to let myself get attached to any Kanaka kid. I wasn't that kind of a man then. So I says to 'im:

"'Don't yer come on the *Potii Ata* with that guitar or any of that influenza. I'm not feedin' any boys but my regular crew.' An' then I concluded, 'No, yer can't be my feedin' boy.'

"Do yer know wot a feedin' boy is, Stanton?"

The captain leaned over the round of the green table top until the electric stream of light flooded his brutally disfigured face. For a moment Stanton toyed with the ice in his glass of Dr. Funk and looked at the billiard-room wall. Then he said that he did not know.

"A feedin' boy is the same thing as a kid yer adopt," explained Captain Logan. "Only yer won't fin' the word 'adopt' in the Kanaka's dictionary. 'E 'as another word. It is 'feedin'. W'en a Kanaka wants to make somebody else's kid 'is own, 'e says 'e'll take 'im for 'is feedin' boy. 'E agrees to feed 'im an' 'ang a shirt an' a pair of dungarees on 'im. Usually 'e gives the kid just a four franc *pareu*.

"Well, I told the kid that I didn't want 'im. An' that 'e would 'ave to get away from the *Potii Ata*. I 'ave always 'ad a 'ard name out 'ere in Oceania, but I wasn't rough with the kid, Stanton. I let 'im an' 'is guitar down easy on the beach.

"The streets were full of Kanaka kids wot 'ad lost their mothers an' fathers. I could 'ave loaded the *Potii Ata* with feedin' boys an' girls.

"W'y, Stanton, in six weeks eight thousan' Kanakas died off like sand-flies on this islan' of T'yti. Fourteen 'undred of them went in Papeete. Yer should 'ave seen the dead. An' 'ardly any one to dig graves. They burned most of the bodies. It was easier than buryin'.

"Now an' then a win'jammer sneaked in through the reef. Sometimes the crew was down with influenza. W'en it wasn't, it was put to burnin' bodies. Each man was paid a 'undred francs a day. A few did collect three or four 'undred francs before the influenza threw them on the same pile they were burnin'.

"Well, w'en I told the kid to get away from the *Potii Ata*, 'e went off cryin'. About one o'clock that afternoon 'e was back again with 'is guitar.

"'Captain,' 'e says, comin' alongside the *Potii Ata* where I was mixin' some paint for the galley, 'I've been all over Papeete, an' I didn't see any one I like so much as yer. Please, won't yer let me be yer feedin' boy?'

"'Get away,' I snapped like I was goin' to throw a paint tin at 'im. 'I don't want no snivelin' Kanaka around me.'

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"An' then I told 'im that I was waitin' for some papers from the port captain. I don't know wot made me tell the kid about them papers.

"Yer see, Stanton," explained Captain Logan as he drained his glass of punch and watched the mate ring for a second round, "I was waitin' for the administration officials to knock the locks off their 'ouses an' come out. They 'ad kept themselves under lock an' key from the mornin' the influenza 'it the islan'.

"An' the governor didn't care 'ow many Kanakas died. 'E was called 'ome right after that. The colonials out this way aren't the very best of people, yer'll soon fin'.

"One Frenchman, the port captain, 'ad some papers I needed. I told the kid that just as soon as I 'ad them papers I was goin' to clear for the Paumotus. A couple of schooner boys 'ad told me that drunken 'Enry McFonald, the Pendren Islan' trader, 'ad stolen about all my trade over in the Paumotus while I was layin' in the cabin of the *Potii Ata* with 'ot rum an' influenza. An' I 'ad to make the islan's —— quick.

" 'Enry McFonald is a 'ard piece of machinery. 'Ere in T'yti the old Kanakas remember 'im as 'Merry-Go-Round 'Enry.' 'E brought the first merry-go-round down 'ere to the islan's twenty-eight years ago. An' 'e made the Kanakas pay —— 'igh for their rides.

"McFonald couldn't make a livin' if it wasn't for the Kanakas. Ask 'im wot 'is business is an' 'e'll say without battin' an eye, 'Robbin' Kanakas.'

" 'Enry McFonald 'as been sore at me from the afternoon I traded the clock for that Paumotus pearl. It was about seven months before the kid saw me on the *Potii Ata*. The native was goin' to let 'Enry 'ave the pearl. W'en 'e saw my clock 'e would 'ave nothin' to do with 'Enry.

"McFonald 'as sworn to get me for that. 'E did once. 'E's workin' with Levis, I think.

"NOW wot do yer suppose the kid did w'en I told 'im about them papers, Stanton?"

Captain Logan paused as the bar-boy set down the drinks. And for a brief moment he allowed his little brown eyes to run over the tables from where the club members were shooting furtive glances at him and his mate. Stanton looked up inquiringly at Captain Logan.

"The kid left the beach," continued the captain. "I thought 'e was goin' to 'ave nothin' more to do with me. I says to myself, ' 'E won't come back again.' But 'e did.

"In about an hour an' a 'arf 'e came runnin' down to the *Potii Ata*. 'E 'ad some papers.

" 'Captain, 'ere's yer papers,' the kid cried. 'Now may I be yer feedin' boy?'

"I ran down the gang-plank an' snatched the papers from 'im. They were as good as pearl-shell. I looked for the captain of port's signature an' foun' it written across the red imprint of 'is official rubber stamp.

" 'Where did yer get these papers?' I wanted to know. 'An' 'ow in the —— did yer manage it?' Usually the French take a week or more to write their names on such papers.

" 'From the port captain,' says the kid, tryin' to take 'is guitar up the gang-plank of the *Potii Ata*. 'The port captain 'ad just unlocked 'imself an' 'is family. I told 'im that yer 'ad to get out of Papeete tonight. 'E told me to come back tomorrow or the day after. Then I says that 'Enry McFonald of Pendren Islan' is stealin' yer trade. 'E shrugged 'is shoulders an', after makin' me wait, made out the papers.'

"Then the kid asked me once more—

" 'Captain, won't yer let me be yer feedin' boy?'

" 'No, I won't,' I snapped. 'Now, get away from 'ere or I'll 'and yer over to the gendarme.' I don't believe that I could have found the gendarme. 'E was shut in 'is 'ouse, too.

"W'en the kid 'ad gone I turned to see about puttin' the *Potii Ata* in shape for the run out that night. The trade stuff 'ad all been brought on. There wasn't anything to do but 'urry up to the Coconut 'Otel an' get my four-boy crew down to the beach. The new crew 'ad gone up there to see 'ow the girls 'ad made out with the influenza.

"We squared off from the reef about sundown. Along toward eight o'clock I 'ad to go down into the cabin. W'en I went below I foun' the kid. 'E was sittin' on the spare bunk. 'Is guitar was across 'is knees, an' 'e was as cool as this punch I'm drinkin'. 'E 'ad stowed away under the bunk.

" 'Captain, I 'ad to come,' 'e says before I could ask 'im wot the —— 'e was doin' on the *Potii Ata*. 'I couldn't stay on the beach an' watch yer shove out without me. 'Enry McFonald 'as stolen yer trade, an' yer might need me over in the Paumotus.'

"I didn't say anything. I just knocked the kid an' 'is guitar on the deck. W'en I went up above the next minute, 'e was still layin' there with one 'and on the guitar.

" ' 'Eave to,' I tells the crew. 'I'm goin' back to T'yti.' I 'ad never done such a thing before.

" 'I'm not goin' to 'ave any guitar-pickin' kid fetchin' me bad luck over in the Paumotus,' I says to the boys.

"Besides, I knew that 'Enry McFonald couldn't steal much more of my trade in the little time I was goin' to lose. An' after I'd cleared Papeete I saw that I should 'ave taken along about five more tins of rum.

"Yer see, Stanton, until the administration

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got on to us we carried our rum out to the Paumotus in coal-oil tins. As McFonald says, 'Booze is boss in the islan's.' Give a Kanaka rum an' 'e'll let yer take everything 'e 'as. But not always, as yer'll see before I 'ave finished."

CAPTAIN LOGAN permitted Stanton to order the glasses refilled. Then, looking toward the billiard room where the Vairao chief was leading the annual inter-district tournament by four points, he continued:

"W'en I tied up in Papeete a couple 'ours later I booted the kid an' 'is guitar off the *Potii Ata*. 'E was cryin' again—not 'cos I 'ad booted 'im, but 'cos 'e couldn't go along. 'E was crazy about me, that kid was.

"The next mornin' before throwin' off the lines an' beatin' out again I went all over the *Potii Ata* with a flash-lamp. I wanted to make sure the kid wasn't on. I didn't see 'im.

"But about the end of the third day I 'eard some one pickin' a guitar an' singin' in Kanaka down in the trade-room. I shoved open the hatch an' saw the kid.

"All about 'im were broken sea-biscuits wot 'e 'adn't finished eatin', mango-stones an' empty drinkin'-coconuts. 'E was singin' as though 'e was at a *himine* or native sing-song. 'E 'ad gotten so lonesome down there among all the trade stuff 'e 'ad 'idden in that 'e 'ad to sing. W'en 'e saw me 'e stopped singin' an' smiled.

"Now, Stanton, I 'auled 'im up on deck. I booted 'im clean up to the forecastle 'ead. Then I knocked 'im with my fists until 'e was as far aft as the wheel. After that I says to 'im—

" 'I'm not goin' to put back to T'yti again, but I'm goin' to make yer wish that I 'ad.'

"The kid says nothin'. 'E just looked up into my face like a dog does an' smiled.

" 'Yer'll sleep on the forecastle-'ead deck,' I told 'im. 'An' when it rains yer'll sleep up there just the same.'

" 'Captain, that won't be too much for me,' 'e says. 'For then wherever yer sail the *Potii Ata* I'll be servin' yer.' An' again 'e smiled.

"I gave the crew instructions to make it 'ot as T'yti for 'im. An' they sure did.

"If there was a 'eavy job the kid was put at it. 'E was made to fetch an' carry like a dog. An' we took 'is guitar away an' 'id it. The guitar was all 'e 'ad. The crew wanted to use it for tradin', but I wasn't that kind of a man. All I wanted was to get rid of the kid.

"In them days I shipped a Kanaka mate. 'E was always thinkin' up things to do to the kid. 'E would send 'im after a piece of rope. While the kid was lookin' for it the second Kanaka would order 'im down to the trade-room for some biscuits. In the trade-room 'e'd meet the third Kanaka who'd send 'im to the cabin to fetch the rum-bottle for refillin'. I'd meet 'im in the cabin an' want to know right away wot the —— 'e was doin' there. Then I'd order 'im off to the trade-room after the salted 'orse for supper.

" 'Obey the last order,' was one of the special rules I 'ad made for the kid. An' I always insisted on 'im doin' that. W'en the kid reached the trade-room the mate wanted to know where 'is piece of rope was. The second Kanaka asked w'y 'e 'adn't got 'is biscuits. Then the one who 'ad sent 'im after the rum-bottle wanted to know w'y 'e 'adn't brought it. At that all three sailed into 'im an' 'ammered 'im up on deck.

"I'd come along an' put 'im to some kind of dirty work that would take the rest of the afternoon. An' always the kid looked up at me an' smiled in that crazy way of 'is.

"W'en we weren't 'ammerin' 'im around the *Potii Ata*, an' I couldn't find any more dirty work, I'd put 'im to learnin' navigation. 'E was a sailor from the fifth day. Not before long the crew was makin' 'im do some of their tricks at the wheel. An' not once did 'e whimper about all that work an' abuse. Nor did 'e ever ask for 'is guitar.

"We did not permit 'im to open 'is mouth unless 'e was spoken to. I was makin' sure that 'e'd run away from the *Potii Ata* just as soon as she tied up again in Papeete. But 'e didn't."

CAPTAIN LOGAN paused to watch a trader who had come up the long flight of stairs at the farther end of the veranda. The captain recognized him as one of the men who were betting heavily that Captain Logan was not strong enough to ship the boy with Stanton.

The mate rang for a package of Rosettes, lighted one of the island cigarets and urged—

"Go on, Logan."

"W'en the three months' run was over," continued Captain Logan, bringing his eyes back from the trader, who had relieved a merchant in one of the poker games, "an' I 'ad sold the ten tons of copra 'Enry McFonald 'adn't gotten 'old of, the kid came to me on the beach an' says:

" 'Captain, 'Enry McFonald 'as stolen yer trade. Next 'e's goin' to stick a knife in yer. 'E don't want yer in the trade at all. I'm afraid of 'im. Can't I go out again?'

" 'No, yer're not goin' to ship any more,' I says to 'im. ' 'Enry McFonald 'as stolen my trade, but 'e won't do murder. 'E 'asn't a stomach for that. Yer 'ave got to leave the *Potii Ata* tonight.'

"I gave 'im back 'is guitar an' paid 'im a few francs.

" 'Go up to The Bamboo an' buy yerself a meal from the Chinaman,' I says. 'After that

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run around to the *Palais* an' see a picture.'

" 'E didn't go. 'E sat on a bench an' cried. I wanted to boot 'im off the bench. But I couldn't, Stanton—not after the way 'e 'ad smiled through the work an' abuse we 'ad given 'im.

"That night I walked the *Quai du Commerce.* An' for the next two nights. All the time I was figurin' 'ow I could get rid of 'im. I concluded to let 'im make one more trip.

" 'E'll 'ave to go then,' I sez to myself. 'I'm not goin' to be carryin' any Kanaka kid around the South Pacific.'

"We cleared out as soon as the copra was unloaded. I'd considerable trade stuff left over from the last run. An' I was still afraid of wot 'Enry McFonald was doin' to me over in the Paumotus.

"Goin' out I told the crew to let up a bit on the kid. An' I allowed 'im to strum the four strings on 'is guitar. One night about an hour after I 'ad rolled in I 'eard some one sneakin' into the cabin.

" 'Who's that?' I asked.

" 'It's only me,' says the kid, droppin' on the deck alongside my bunk. 'Can't I sleep 'ere tonight, captain? It's rainin' 'ard. I won't make any noise.'

"Now, Stanton, there was no 'arm in that, I thought. At first I was goin' to say no. Then I told 'im that 'e could sleep there. Every night after that w'en it rained 'e would come down into the cabin to ask if 'e couldn't sleep there on the deck. I always let 'im.

"About two days before the *Potii Ata* 'it the first big tradin' islan's over in the eastern Paumotus the kid came to me an' asked a funny thing. 'E wanted to know if I wouldn't show 'im 'ow to shoot the schooner's rifle.

"That struck me as an unusual thing for the kid to ask. So for the fun of it I told 'im to fetch the gun. I gave 'im about an hour of shootin'. An' I'm glad now that I did, Stanton.

"The kid could shoot from the beginnin'. It was just natural for 'im. 'E shot from the shoulder an' not the 'ip, like most islanders do. *Bang, bang, bang* went the rifle. An' *thud, thud, thud* the frigate-birds 'it the deck. 'Ow that kid could shoot!

"Once that afternoon when 'e was shootin' the kid stopped an' paid me a funny compliment.

" 'Captain,' says 'e, 'the seas are many, an' as deep as they're wide, an' they are full of treachery. Yer'll fin' that most men are like the seas. But I'm not afraid to serve yer.'

"That was a funny thing for a Kanaka kid to say, Stanton. But 'e was crazy to be servin' me, that kid was. 'E was just like a dog—all the time wantin' to fetch things.

"The *Potii Ata* fetched the eastern Paumotus. I 'ad always done good over there. But now there wasn't a ton of copra or shell to be 'ad. There was plenty of it, yer understand, but the natives wouldn't trade.

"I made every kin' of a trader's inducement. I says that I'd give cash or trade goods. I poured rum in front of them an' drank it. Even that didn't impress them. So I let them try a little of the booze. An' still they gave me that 'I-don't-care-about-yer-booze' look. For once booze was not boss.

"They just grinned an' went back to their 'uts. Mornin' after mornin' for every bit of a week I tramped through the 'ot sun an' the wild jungle. I tried every trick known on the beach to bring them natives around to my way. At the end I 'adn't a ton of copra. Their shell an' copra 'ad been bought, they told me.

"ONE night I was on the beach—down in the mouth an' wishin' that I was 'ome again in Liverpool. I 'ad told myself that the kid, as well as 'Enry McFonald, 'ad brought me all this rotten luck.

"About that time the kid came down from the bush where the 'ouses were an' looked at me for several minutes without sayin' a word. 'E was all worried. Ten tons of copra on the last run, an' nothin' for this trip so far. An' copra sellin' in Papeete at a franc an' a 'arf a kilo!

" 'Captain, 'Enry McFonald 'as stuck 'is knife in yer,' the kid finally says. 'Yer can't trade 'ere.'

"I weighed anchor at once an' squared away for Rikeuru. It is the first islan' in the second big group.

" 'Things'll be better over there,' I says to the kid.

"Again there was plenty of shell an' copra. An' the divin' season at Rikeuru 'ad been a good one. Several divers showed me pearls that were better than the big water-white one I traded the clock for. Yer've seen the kin' of pearls, Stanton, that drive men to rob their employers or do murder in order to 'ang them on the throats of their women.

"Once more I talked, 'Booze, cash or trade goods.' I put everything on deck where the natives could see wot I 'ad. They would 'ardly look at the stuff. They just grinned an' strutted back to their 'uts. They wouldn't let a ton of copra or shell go.

"An' the pearls! Well, they could 'ave been their twenty fathoms down in the lagoon instead of in the natives' pandanus 'ouses.

"One man told me that 'e was waitin' for 'Enry McFonald. 'E did not 'ave long to wait. McFonald came in the next mornin' on 'is schooner, the *Vahine Rahi*—the *Big Woman.* She's a 'undred tons.

"W'en I saw McFonald 'e was standin' on the forecastle 'ead. 'E 'ad on a dirty cotton undershirt an' a red an' yellow *pareu.* 'E was barefooted like 'is toothless Kanaka woman beside 'im.

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"I knew that 'e 'ad been drinkin'. 'E's always drinkin'. Right away I says to myself—

" 'As sure as dried coconut-meat is copra there's goin' to be a wasps' nest flyin' between 'Enry McFonald an' Fred Logan.'

"There was—the biggest nest that ever broke loose at Rikeuru Islan'.

"McFonald saw the *Potii Ata* lyin' at one end of the lagoon. 'E thought at first that she was a Ward tradin'-schooner an' that I was Tom Bradley, Ward's T'yti manager. 'E yelled across the water—

" 'There ayn't no trade 'ere for yer, yer dirty son of a Bradley!'

"Then 'e saw that I was Logan an' not Tom Bradley. 'E came over in 'is shore-goin' boat an' excused 'imself for callin' me that name. After that 'e sat on the cabin roof, without my askin' 'im, an' began to talk trade. 'Enry McFonald is a slippery wrench.

" 'Tradin' good?' 'e asked as if 'e didn't know wot I 'ad been losin' on the two runs.

" 'It's goin' to be,' I says.

"Then I moved as far aft from 'im as the wheel. 'E stunk like 'e 'ad been eatin' porpoise-meat.

" 'W'en's that?' 'e wanted to know.

" 'E started to roll 'is little blue fish-eyes round in 'is bullet-like 'ead.

" 'That's w'en I wipe up some dirty 'og-fish's slime,' I told 'im.

"McFonald stopped rollin' 'is eyes an' watched me for a second. 'Is mouth filled like 'e was goin' to spit on my clean deck. Then 'e slid into 'is boat where two black boys were grinnin'. Before they pulled 'im back to the *Vahine Rahi* 'e looked up at me an' says:

" 'Logan, don't ever go lookin' on the beach for the milk of 'uman kindness. It ayn't there.'

"That was a funny thing for McFonald to do, I thought—to introduce Bill Shakespeare in the lagoon at Rikeuru Islan'. But then I remembered after McFonald 'ad left 'e does it with Kiplin' an' Mark Twain, too.

"McFonald was on the beach all day. The natives carried down their copra an' shell to 'im like they were bonitas runnin' after a fish 'ook. An' the divers let 'im 'ave 'is pick of the pearls. Oh, 'ow 'e robbed them.

" 'E argued with one diver all afternoon over a thirty-dollar phonograph an' a dozen records wot 'ad music on both sides. McFonald finally let 'im 'ave the outfit an' a tin of rum for a pearl that Ah Choy gave 'Enry five thousan' dollars for 'ere in Papeete.

"Of course I ayn't sayin', Stanton, that I wouldn't 'ave done the same if I 'ad been 'im."

CAPTAIN LOGAN looked across the table at his mate as if he were waiting for the latter to make some comment.

"Logan, I am not interested in what you would have done if you had been in Henry McFonald's place. I know what you would have done," said Stanton sharply, relighting his cigaret.

He glanced casually along the veranda where interest in poker-playing was waning fast, like the yellow lamp of the moon hanging over the long, feathery palms on the little quarantine island in the heart of the lagoon.

"Go on with your story of the boy. And don't be until eleven o'clock tellin' it. Your friends have become too curious."

"Well, there was McFonald an' me," resumed Captain Logan, frowning at the thought of the men referred to as his friends. " 'E 'ad stolen my trade. I thought 'e was satisfied. But 'e 'ad somethin' dirtier in 'is rum-logged brain.

"That night the kid came down into the cabin an' asked if 'e could sleep on the deck alongside me. W'en I told 'im that 'e could 'e says—

" 'Captain, 'Enry McFonald 'as been tellin' the Rikeuru Islan'ers that 'e is goin' to put yer on the beach—'ere at Rikeuru.'

"Now, I knew McFonald would try some stinkin' beach trick like that. I know 'im as well as any Chinaman knows wot's inside a 'og-fish. McFonald did try somethin'—an' the next mornin'. 'E put this scar on my face.

"It all started w'en the mate of the *Potii Ata* came an' asked me to give 'im 'is money. 'E says that 'e wanted to buy a twenty-fathom pearl for 'is woman in Vairao. I let 'im 'ave 'is wages. Then the three remainin' boys of the crew came for the same thing, an' I gave them theirs.

"The mate came back at noon an' says that 'e 'ad decided to run back to Papeete with McFonald. An' that 'Enry would pay 'im more than 'e was gettin' from me.

"I told 'im that 'e couldn't ship on the *Vahine Rahi*. I 'ad 'is name on my articles for a two-way run, and I put down the law of French Oceania to 'im.

" 'E says that my articles didn't count for anything in the Paumotus. Then 'e went over to McFonald.

"That afternoon one of the boys told me that 'e 'ad made up to a Rikeuru girl an' wasn't goin' back to Papeete. An' w'en I was ashore for water that night the two remainin' boys went aboard the *Potii Ata* an' stole a tin of rum.

"They took their sleepin'-mats an' went over to the *Vahine Rahi*. I went, too—not for the boys, but after my tin of rum.

"McFonald was in the cabin. 'E was drinkin' with 'is fat Kanaka woman that 'e 'ad taken out from Papeete. She was as filthy as the *Vahine Rahi*. She 'adn't washed 'erself or changed 'er blue dress since leavin' T'yti. I believe that she 'ad promised 'Enry not to do them things until 'e shaved 'imself.

" 'McFonald,' I says to 'im without any ceremony, 'I 'ave come for my tin of rum.'

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" 'I don't know anything about yer booze,' 'e snickered; 'but 'ave some of mine.'

" 'E filled a cup with rum an' shoved it across the table. I was almost sure it was from the tin the boys 'ad stolen. So I let 'Enry 'ave the cup of booze in 'is face an' chest. 'Is woman screamed as if I 'ad done 'im in.

"McFonald reeled from the tobacco-box 'e was sittin' on into the center of the deck. 'E 'ad changed color like a tree-lizard. I thought 'e was goin' to fight. I wanted 'im to. I intended to make 'im look like a bag of copra wot 'as fallen in salt water.

" 'Logan, I love to 'ave my fingers burned,' 'e says in a breath rottin' from rum an' fish. 'W'en that 'appens I burn the other fellow's.'

" 'E staggered back to the table an' says to 'is woman, who was now sittin' in the companionway an' laughin' through the black strings of 'air wot 'ad fallen over 'er eyes:

" 'Come on, Reva. Take a trip to Rome.'

"She made the trip. First she refilled 'is glass, an' then 'er own. She can drink like a soldier. I returned to the *Potii Ata* without 'ittin' McFonald an' without the tin of rum.

"McFonald 'ad bought off my crew an' Rikeuru Islan' as well. No one would ship with me. I asked among all the 'ouses for a crew. At every 'ut the boys grinned an' says: '*Aita Maitai!*' They meant, 'No, we won't sign on the *Potii Ata.*' By now I knew wot McFonald meant w'en 'e says, 'Logan, I love to 'ave my fingers burned.'

"On the third day 'e finished loadin' the *Vahine Rahi.* 'E 'ad made one of the richest 'auls in all 'is Paumotus stealin'. 'E was about to add several thousan' pounds to the money 'e 'ad banked in New Zealan' for the time w'en the Administration runs 'im out of French Oceania. An' 'e 'ad put me on the beach at Rikeuru, just as 'e told the natives 'e would.

"There I was, Stanton, marooned on my own boat, an' the 'urricane season comin' on. I 'adn't anything but twenty tons of trade goods I couldn't trade an' a guitar-strummin' Kanaka kid I was tryin' to get rid of. Even 'Enry McFonald didn't want 'im. For a couple nights before McFonald 'ad said on the beach:

" 'About that boy of yers, Logan. I'm not a cradle-robber, but I am a cradle-reader. That kid won't bring yer any good.'

" 'Wot the —— good is 'e to me?' I asked. I 'ad to 'ave a four-boy crew, not a kid that was fetchin' me things all the time. But that was before the shark took the kid's arm.

"I 'ave told yer, Stanton, that McFonald 'anded me this scar. But 'e didn't do it 'imself.

"ON THE fourth night a Rikeuru Islander came down into the cabin of the *Potii Ata* an' asked me if I would ship 'im. 'E told me that 'e could get three other seaworthy boys. Right away the thing looked funny 'cos the same feller 'ad refused to sign on the night before.

" 'E 'ad on a pair of new dungarees an' shoes wot 'ad come out of the *Vahine Rahi's* trade-room. About 'is 'ips was a red-an'-yellow *pareu* like McFonald wears. An' 'e 'ad been drinkin' rum.

"W'en 'e came down I was at my table bringin' the *Potii Ata's* log to date. I was puttin' in it all the things wot 'ad 'appened at Rikeuru. The kid was in the cabin too. 'E was sittin' near the *Potii Ata's* rifle. The Rikeuru Islander didn't see 'im or the gun.

"I got up to reach for the articles. The native was in front of me, an' I tried to shove 'im out of the way. At that 'e w'acked me across the fore'ead an' face with the long Paumotus knife 'e 'ad 'idden under 'is *pareu.* I 'it the deck, bleedin'.

" 'More of McFonald,' I cried to the kid.

"Then I 'eard the gun bang. The Kanaka screamed an' rushed up on deck. The kid followed with the rifle in 'is 'ands. There was a big slash as the Rikeuru Islander dived into the lagoon. The gun went off again.

" 'Captain, 'e won't knife yer any more,' the kid shouted down the companionway the next moment.

" 'E came an' 'elped me up on deck. My fore'ead was ripped an' bleedin'. My nose 'ad been torn in two, an' my left eye was shut. It too was full of blood.

"The beach was alive with 'owlin' savages. Several boys 'ad pushed out in their canoes an' were 'angin' around where the kid 'ad shot down the native. They were too scared to attack because of the kid an' 'is gun.

" 'Where's McFonald?' I asked. 'The dirty sand-louse!'

" ' 'E 'as just gone to sea,' says the kid. 'E tightened 'is arm around me an' led me down into the cabin. ' 'E's too far out for me to get with the rifle.'

"Then the kid an' me practised some —— rough surgery. 'E didn't ask that night if he could sleep on the cabin-deck. Nor the two nights after that. 'E stayed up to watch me.

"In the day-time 'e'd tramp off into the jungle an' fetch back an armful of native 'erbs. W'en 'e 'ad boiled out all the red juice that was in them, 'e bathed my face an' 'ead. Then all my pain went away an' I 'ad sleep.

"The kid fetched more than ever for me. An' 'e carried water an' cooked in the galley. Also 'e washed down the decks every mornin'. A Rikeuru woman wanted to do them things. But the kid would 'ave none of 'er.

" 'I'm servin' yer,' 'e told me. 'E served so well that in two weeks I was able to go ashore.

"Then the kid lost 'is arm in the mouth of a shark. Again 'e was servin' me. An' again 'e smiled.

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"I 'AD gone ashore one afternoon to tell the 'ead man of the islan' that as chief 'e would 'ave to give me a crew. I told 'im that unless I 'ad the four boys by mornin' I'd put back to T'yti with just the kid an' report the whole islan'. Them Rikeuru Islanders are terribly afraid of the French.

"By sundown that afternoon I 'ad the boys. I was in a 'urry to clear Rikeuru. The 'urricane season was almost on, an' I 'ad an appointment in Papeete with 'Enry McFonald. I didn't want to miss it or be late.

"Now, Stanton, at times the lagoon at Rikeuru is alive with sharks. I 'ad shoved out from shore with the four boys in a tiny native canoe. It was overloaded. W'en the thing was about a 'undred fathoms from the *Potii Ata* it capsized.

"The four Rikeuru Islanders an' I were in the water. We were 'angin' to the canoe. I saw the kid on the *Potii Ata* an' 'ailed 'im. At that moment one of the boys screamed an' let go 'is 'old on the canoe. A shark 'ad taken 'im. 'E 'ad been pulled down by the leg.

"The three remainin' boys began to scream. They tried to climb out of the water an' up on the bottom of the canoe. It would 'ardly 'old one person, let alone the four of us. I cursed an' struck at the native nearest me. 'E 'it back an' broke my canoe hold.

"I gave up the idea of clingin' to the canoe, an' began to swim toward the *Potii Ata*. The kid was puttin' out in the shore-goin' boat toward us.

"Two of the Rikeuru Islanders decided to come along with me. The three of us swam together. Now an' then I put my bandaged face into the water an' looked around for sharks.

"About that time we 'eard the shrieks of the native who 'ad stayed be'ind to climb up on the bottom of the canoe. A shark 'ad grabbed 'im in the same manner as the first boy 'ad been taken.

"I looked into the water again an' saw a shark passin' directly in front of me. 'E must 'ave been full nine feet long, an' 'e 'ad a blue sand-papery 'ide. 'E turned an' made a rush for me.

"I dove under 'im. 'E got the native who 'ad been swimmin' alongside me. W'en I came to the surface I saw 'im draggin' the poor devil down. 'E 'ad 'im by the middle. The native was screamin' in a 'orrible manner.

"The beach was black with Rikeuru Islan'ers. Not one of them would put out to 'elp us. A Rikeuru Islander will watch 'is own brother be pulled under, 'e is so afraid of a shark.

"W'en the native was taken the *Potii Ata* was about eighty fathoms off. I could never swim that far with sharks in the lagoon. The kid was about forty fathoms from me, I judged. 'E was pullin' as well as 'e could for 'is age.

"I looked back to see where the remainin' boy was. 'E was almost alongside me. We drew in together so that we might be prepared for any more sharks.

"There was one more. 'E was swimmin' in front of us, an' was not in any great 'aste. Per'aps it was a shark wot 'ad filled its belly with one of the three men. I don't know.

"I BEGAN to swim more slowly. I 'ad to keep track of that monster. Also, I 'ad to keep yellin' for the kid to pull 'arder. My 'ead was crackin' like a nut—there was so much pain. I could not swim much farther.

"The kid was about twenty-five fathoms from us w'en the last boy gave a 'orrible screech an' sank. 'E 'ad been grabbed by a shark wot 'ad been trailin' be'ind.

"Then the shark I was watchin' made 'is first attack. I was a second quicker than 'e. For long before 'e attacked I remembered an old trick a Paumotus Islander 'ad showed me.

"A shark 'as to roll on 'is back before 'e can grab anything, Stanton. 'Is mouth is away down under 'is snout.

"As the shark was about to make the back roll I got both 'ands on 'is 'ead. In this way I managed to 'old 'im off. 'E 'ad to break away from me completely.

"Now the shark started to work round me in a big circle. 'E attacked the second time, rushing' in 'eadlong, an' called it a miss. Then 'e began all over 'is circlin'. 'E was in no 'urry this time. It looked like 'e wanted to finish me for sure on the next rush.

"I 'ad now given up 'ope. The kid was about ten fathoms away. But I didn't 'ave the strength to fight the shark an' swim. An' the kid 'adn't brought a line along to throw to me. So I put my face back into the water to watch the shark. 'E was still maneuverin' for the dash that would finish me.

"Just as 'e was about to make it, I saw a small, brown body pass between me an' the shark. It was the kid.

" 'Captain, swim for the boat!' 'e shouted, comin' to the surface.

"An' then 'e laughed, like 'e was at a native picnic:

" 'I'm goin' to tickle this shark. Ticklin' sharks is my play.'

"From that minute I did as the kid told me. I swam slowly on. Always the kid was between me an' the shark.

" 'Steady captain!' 'e called out as I was 'avin' a 'ard time of it. 'Now, dive. Swim slowly. More to the right, captain!'

"Several times the shark almost got me. But each time the kid was there the second before I would 'ave been shark-meat.

"By the time I fetched the shore-goin' boat I could 'ardly climb in. I dropped into the bottom of the boat an' lay like I was drowned.

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After wot seemed days I 'eard a long wail go up from the frightened Kanakas who 'ad been watchin' on the beach.

"'I looked over the bulwark of the boat an' saw a shark draggin' the kid down. 'Is left arm was in the shark's mouth, spoutin' blood. An' 'is 'ead an' shoulders were out of the water as the shark raced 'im round in a circle. The kid was screechin' in a 'eart-breakin' way.

" 'E saw me an' smiled in a manner like 'e 'ad never done on the *Potii Ata*. In 'is farewell smile was all the undyin' love an' devotion 'e 'ad for me.

" 'Good-by, captain,' 'e cried as the shark completed the last circle.

"An' then for the first time in the four months we 'ad been together 'e wanted to know—

" ' 'Ave I served yer well?'

"Before I could tell 'im that 'e 'ad served too well, I fainted in the boat."

CAPTAIN LOGAN'S face had a worn and haggard expression. Stanton remarked that the cheeks were sunken and gray, like the belly of the little lizard running across the table after a fly, while the eyes lacked all semblance of luster. The horrible scar was a puckered white line. And there was in the captain's voice a faint suggestion of physical feebleness.

So wasted was the face, Captain Logan might have again been in the shark-infested lagoon, striving in vain to win to the *Potii Ata*. Stanton rang for service.

"W'en I came back to myself the stars were out. An' some one was lyin' with me in the boat," Captain Logan resumed as his hand reached nervously for the glass of punch before him. "At first I thought that 'e was dead, for 'e was unconscious an' 'ardly breathin'. 'Is left forearm was gone at the elbow.

"I crawled over an' took 'im in my arms. Then I cried for joy—like a woman does w'en 'er first baby comes. It was the little Kanaka kid.

"That night 'e slept for the first time in the spare bunk of the *Potii Ata*. An' I fetched for 'im as I 'ave fetched for no man.

"W'en 'e opened 'is eyes at last an' saw me all worried an' leanin' over 'is bandaged arm, 'e smiled an' says—

" 'Captain, I 'ave come back to serve yer again.'

" 'E looked up at me. 'Is eyes were no longer tired, but soft an' warm, like a seal's. Then 'e asked—

" 'But won't yer let me be yer feedin' boy?'

" 'Yer goin' to be more than a feedin' boy to me,' I says. 'Yer can 'ave my name, if yer'll take it. Yer know that it is a 'ard name out 'ere in French Oceania.'

"Stanton, there's a ceremony in the South Seas which binds two men closer together than blood-brothership. It is w'en they exchange their names.

"Now, I 'ave never been married 'cos another man ran away with the girl I wanted. I 'ave always wished for a boy of my own. An' I 'ave always wondered wot 'e would 'ave been like could I 'ave 'ad the boy. But no blood-son could 'ave been more faithful than the little Kanaka kid whose mother an' father were taken away by the influenza.

"W'en I told 'im that 'e could 'ave my first name, as the custom 'as always been, 'e says:

" 'Oh, that is wonderful, captain! It is a good name yer're givin' me.'

" 'It is well, Mao,' 'e went on, puttin' 'is one 'and in mine an' callin' me by 'is first name. 'I shall always think Freddy. W'en I 'ave myself in mind, I shall be thinkin' of yer. W'enever men call me Freddy, at once I shall remember my captain. An' always I'll serve yer—to the ends of the seas, to all the islan's in the midst of the seas, an' even across the earth beyond the waters, if need be.'

"That's the reason, Stanton, I called 'im Freddy down on the *Potii Ata* tonight. An' that is w'y there is a new will lyin' in the big safe over at Ward's store. Yesterday mornin' I 'ad a *notaire* fix the papers so that the kid'll get my interest in the *Potii Ata* an' wot money I may leave in store w'en I make the long run over to the other shore.

"W'en the kid 'ad finished 'e added a second after:

" 'But, Mao, I won't be able to play on the guitar any more for yer. Yer won't mind that, will yer?'

"I couldn't say anything. I was almost cryin'. But just before I went up on deck to give the second crew of Rikeuru Islanders instructions about clearin' the lagoon I asked the kid a question—

" 'Freddy, 'ow did yer get loose from the shark's jaw?'

" 'Oh,' 'e says like that, laughin' through 'is pain an' givin' me no logical explanation at all, 'w'en the shark 'ad eaten as much of my arm as 'e wanted I tickled 'im with my toes until 'e went tearin' around to see who was be'ind 'im. Then I swam to the boat.'

" 'I 'ave always known sharks,' 'e went on. 'The day I was born my father killed a shark that 'ad attacked 'im. 'Cos I came on that day my mother called me Mao. *Mao* means shark.'

"Now, Stanton, I never did fin' out 'ow much 'Enry McFonald 'ad to do with the Rikeuru Islander wot tried to do me in," Captain Logan finished, looking unhappily at Stanton.

Never had he seen the mate stirred by so profound an agitation as he saw in that look at Stanton's face; the stern face of the man

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whom money had impelled to remain unmoved by the sufferings of his fellow creatures, the man who was taking that night for throwing on the beach the boy who had made himself of worth to Captain Logan in the lagoon at Rikeuru Island.

" 'Enry McFonald says that 'e doesn't understand w'y the native knifed me. I 'ave no real proof that 'e does. An' I didn't take up the matter with the *Commissaire de Police* 'ere in Papeete. We don't settle things in that fashion south of the line. We take our medicine an' wait our turn.

"McFonald is an oily piece of machinery. But yer an' I, Stanton, are goin' to wipe 'im dry—an' accordin' to French regulations, too. I am tryin' to play a white game now 'cos of the kid. I'm sick of rum-smugglin' an' rotten beach tricks.

"Yer saw 'ow Levis, the red pig, almost took the *Potii Ata* from me the other day. The kid'll want me more than ever, I'm thinkin', if I am goin' to play the game with the other color. But yer tell me that 'e's not——"

Captain Logan did not finish what he was going to say. For his huge, hairy hand had reached quickly across the table and clutched the mate's arm.

" 'E's come after me," said Captain Logan, nodding his troubled head toward the stairs. " 'E always does w'en 'e thinks that I'm up 'ere drinkin' too much with the boys. Usually 'e waits under the mango-tree across the street."

STANTON looked over his shoulder and saw Captain Logan's boy sitting on the top step. In his hand was a great golden mango, "minted from the precious ore of sun and soil," that he had bought from a Chinaman in front of the *Palais Theatre*.

He was not eating the cool delicious meat of the fruit, Stanton observed. Nor was he interested in the men who were looking away from the card-tables to watch him. In agony of mind his despondent face was toward the *Quai du Commerce* and the lagoon beyond, where the homeless wind was crying in the dark.

A tiny red forecastle light beckoned familiarly across the water. The boy watched it for a moment and then turned his eyes wistfully to the mate.

Now, one of the major rules of Stanton's personal code was to respond immediately when he felt that action front was really wanted. This was not always easy for him to do. He leaned over the table and for a second sat regarding Captain Logan silently.

No longer were his eyes as cold and black as the big rocks down on the beach. For the first time since coming to Tahiti they were suffused with a soft light, as if his soul were going out on a wonderful adventure.

Then Papeete's gaming element, watching through the thin smoke which hung like a blue screen between them and the two men at the extreme end of the veranda, were transfixed by what occurred the next moment, the most incredible thing in the annals of the *Cercle Bougainville*.

Not even the annual inter-district billiard tournament, which the chief of Tautira had won for the first time in five years by seven points, could compare with it.

"Freddy," called Stanton in a tone of huskiness which made his voice so unlike the one to which the boy and Captain Logan were accustomed.

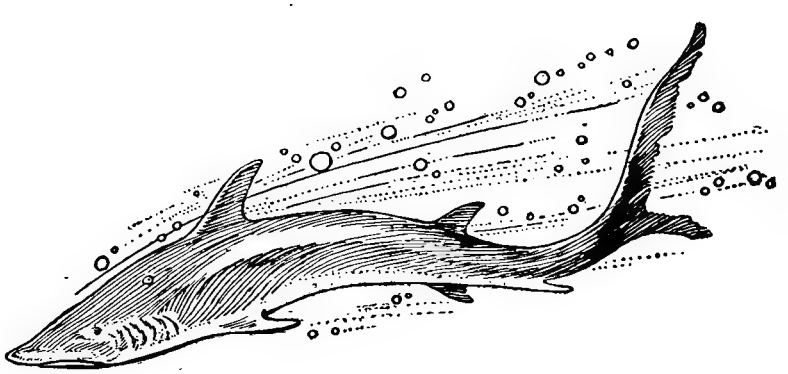
The boy approached slowly but obediently and for what was an intolerable moment of sickening anxiety stood beside the mate.

Stanton made a place at the table as if the boy were a man friend from the beach. After that thumb and forefinger reached instinctively to the service-bell.

"—— and bring Freddy a man's drink, a glass of Dr. Funk," Stanton included in the final order a minute later.

He raised his voice so every one could hear.

"Make sure that it is as well mixed as mine."



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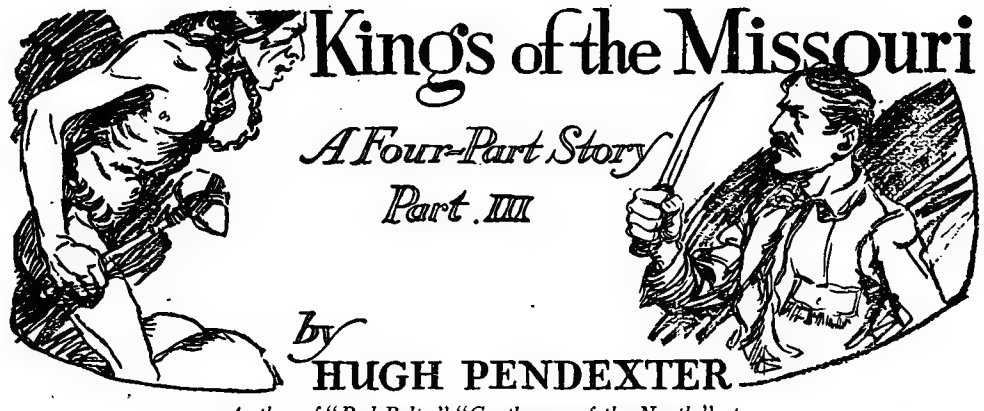

Kings of the Missouri

A Four-Part Story

Part III

by

HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Red Belts," "Gentlemen of the North," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

BEAVER was king at St. Louis in 1831, and the town was fast becoming a great center of trade for the fur country. For many years the American Fur Company had held almost undisputed sway on the vast reaches of the Missouri which mounted high into the Rockies through the country of the Blackfeet, Sioux and Crow nations.

But a dangerous rival was beginning to win pelts which were meant for the storehouses of the A. F. C. It was the young Rocky Mountain Fur Company, first organized by Gen. Ashley, and now led by Jim Bridger, discoverer of Great Salt Lake, South Pass, and bearer of incredible tales about a land called "Yellowstone" where boiling water spouted a hundred feet into the air and Indians owned red-paint caverns.

None thrilled more quickly to tales of the Rocky Mountain men than Ralph Lander, a strapping young clerk in the A. F. C.'s store. Had it not been for his love of little Susette Parker, whose man-handling father was the A. F. C. chief in St. Louis, Lander would have chucked his job over night and joined the opposition. For they were men of his own kind, young and fearless, and their policy of invading the Indian country and trapping furs themselves was far more to his liking than the A. F. C.'s prosaic plan of establishing permanent posts where traders could swap rum and calico for beaver.

Lander's chance to break from the A. F. C. came with astonishing swiftness. One morning as he sorted trade goods he was debating whether to tell Parker of his lover's understanding with Susette, when Phinny, a fellow clerk of unsavory reputation, carried the story to the boss, hoping thereby to discredit Lander still further with the company.

The result followed Phinny's calculations. Parker lost no time in firing Lander, whom he looked upon as common dirt, an *engagé*, and unfit to claim even a glance from his daughter's flashing warm eyes.

"I'll see you don't get a job with any one in St. Louis—nor down-river, less'n it's nigger's work!" roared Parker, and Phinny smiled as he watched them from behind a pile of whisky casks.

In vain Lander tried to meet Susette and tell her of his misfortune. Her father kept her safely indoors. Then Lander turned to one of his few true friends, old "Papa" Clair, an eccentric Frenchman from Louisiana who had taught him the science of knife-play and how to get on in this wild frontier town.

The two visited a water-front drinking-place where Lander hoped to meet Phinny and settle his score. The result surpassed his hopes. He found Phinny lion of the place and boasting of the "yellow cur" he had driven from the A. F. C.'s employ. There followed quickly a blow and challenge for combat. The place of the duel was Bloody Island, where many a famous pioneer had met death in defense of honor.

To Lander's surprize, Bridger, whom he scarcely knew, championed his cause and stood with Papa Clair against a host of A. F. C. men to see that fair play was allowed. The combat was short—pistols at fifteen paces. And when the second shot sounded across the great river Phinny fell.

There was no hope for Lander if he tarried after killing an employee of the A. F. C. Bridger urged him to join the Rocky Mountain expedition about to leave St. Charles, a town near St. Louis. Lander accepted, wrote Susette a parting note in which he asked her to await his return, mounted his mule and bade St. Louis farewell.

St. Charles he found in a turmoil. Prevost, river leader of the Rocky Mountain men, was gathering his host of ruffians in the wet dawn, preparatory to going aboard their keelboat. Then away to the raw, new lands up the Missouri. But before they could leave there must be a battle royal to see who should wear the bully's red belt and "carry the pipe" on the expedition.

"Keelboat style—but no biting, eye-gouging or bone-breaking, and all weapons aside," ordered Prevost.

Gradually the fighting eliminated all except Lander, a huge bruiser called "Porker," and Long Simons, bully of the last trip. The Porker rushed Lander with a grin of exultation but was met by stinging rights and lefts to wind, jaw and throat that left him dazed and roaring. Then casting all caution aside the Porker leaped again at his agile antagonist. Followed a battle that could only end when sheer weight overcame speed and science; and Porker at last won. But there still remained Long Simons—and when the champion finished with

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Porker there was no fight left in his panting, battered hulk.

"It's brutal," admitted Prevost, "but it settles their private quarrels once for all. After this hour it'll be work for all, with grudges forgotten."

Lander turned from the scene of combat at a sound of pounding hoofs. Papa Clair, whom he thought safe in St. Louis, was galloping down the dusty street toward him, fear and high excitement on his face.

PAPA CLAIR'S alarming news was that Tilton and a gang of A. F. C. cut-throats were aboard the steamer *Golden Queen*, which was the boat Prevost expected would take his keelboat in tow. Lander feared arrest, so, with Clair, he rode swiftly into the open country, promising to meet the Rocky Mountain men up-river at Lexington.

Day after day the two fugitives followed a trail running parallel to the Missouri. At times they glimpsed the *River Queen*, towing the keelboat in the yellow stream. After many adventures they arrived at Lexington to find that the A. F. C. men had given up the chase and returned to St. Louis. That day Bridger arrived. And on the following morning the great cavalcade of forty-five mountain men set their faces toward the unknown West, following what was later to be named "The Oregon Trail."

Lander quickly learned the ways of the pioneer, but not without severely trying Bridger's patience. At last, for a grave breach of plains custom, he was sentenced to walk alone behind the party. He became lost, but by luck ran upon Jim Baker, a superstitious old hunter, on his way to join Bridger. And lucky for Lander that he did, for they were attacked the same day by Blackfeet, a tribe which hated the whites and traded only with the Hudson's Bay Company in the North. Lander surprized Baker during the fight by shooting one Indian and dispatching another with his knife. Yet the battle would have ended in the whites' defeat but for their rescue by a friendly band of Crows.

The Crow chief was much impressed by Lander's mighty knife medicine and offered him not only the Crow trade but a daughter if he would make his home with the Crow nation. Lander refused but obtained the chief's promise to bring his trade to Bridger's Summer rendezvous.

The chief then informed them that a large band of Blackfeet, which had recently murdered a Hudson's Bay trader and stolen forty packs of beaver, might be expected to attack very soon. Their apprehension, however, was smothered by the arrival of Bridger and his men.

Bridger's anger at having to search for Lander was tempered by hearing what the boy had done and by meeting with his old friend Baker. They had begun a chat when Baker suddenly spied Simmons wearing the red bully's belt.

"Thar's the dog that says I didn't kill two grizzlies with my bare hands!" roared Baker, stripping off his shirt.

A great struggle followed, the two combatants ringed round by enthusiastic white and red men. At last, his eyes looking up into Baker's wild face, Long John Simons admitted:

"They was regular, full-grown grizzlies, Jim. Extra big 'uns. The bully's belt's on the ground somewhere. It's yourn."

CHAPTER VIII

ALONG THE RIVER TRAIL

BRIDGER now made every effort to reach the rendezvous on Green River ahead of the A. F. C. outfit. He hurried his company by Independence Rock, through the Devil's Gate, then up the Sweetwater for six days to the divide. Although it was uncomfortably warm on the plains the water in the camp-kettles was coated with a quarter of an inch of ice the night they camped on the divide.

Five days later they arrived at the Green—named Rio Verde by the Spanish explorers in 1818, and known as the Siskadee, or Prairie Hen, by the Crows. Camp was pitched a few miles from Horse Creek, and on the first day was invaded by several hundred Nez Percés and Flatheads—who never flattened the head—and fully three hundred traders and trappers. Many of the trappers were Bridger's men who had wintered in the mountains. The others belonged to Arthur J. Wyeth's New England outfit, or were free trappers with small outfits.

A small tent was speedily erected for a saloon and Lander was appointed to handle the liquor trade, both whites and Indians being furious for drink. Lander was kept busy as long as he could stand on his feet, peddling out whisky at five dollars a pint. When he could no longer continue Papa Clair took his place.

There ensued the usual amount of fighting and gambling. Beaver pelts were the only medium of exchange, and as these were dumped on the buffalo robes of the gamblers, small fortunes quickly changed hands. Jim Baker, overfond of drink, set the pace for three days. Then Bridger went to him and suggested—

" 'Bout enough for this time, eh, Jim?"

"I'm a derned fool. Lemme snooze an' I'll wake up sober's a b'iled owl."

He was as good as his word and reported for active duty. He was desirous of getting clear of the camp and Bridger sent him to raise a cache of beaver near the mouth of Horse Creek.

The big spree ended and the wounds were dressed. The trappers began buying their outfits of blankets, red shirts, tobacco and trade trinkets. At the end of seven days Baker and his party returned with eight packs of beaver, running a hundred pounds to the pack and worth about ten dollars a pound in St. Louis.

Baker announced having seen Indian signs, several smokes, and said a large number of Blackfeet were watching the rendezvous through spies and were discouraged from attacking only because of the large number of reds and whites.

Lander, not given to drink, made an ideal

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whisky clerk from a trader's point of view. He found the work too repulsive and asked Bridger to give him other employment.

"Some one had to do it," said Bridger. "It's about all you can do. If no trader did it we could git beaver without it. But so long as one does it all must do it or make no trade. However I'll find something else for you."

If Bridger was inclined to resent Lander's fastidiousness he quickly changed when Black Arrow and a hundred braves rode into camp and announced that they had robes to trade, but would do business with no one but the Medicine Knife. Lander, under Bridger's tutelage, quickly traded the robes. Lander enjoyed this experience much as no liquor figured in the deal.

The Crows, like the Comanches far south, did not drink at this time, having yet to learn the vice through associating with the Assiniboins. Exchanging their robes only for goods, they were always well-dressed after the Indian fashion, wealthy in horses and quite the plutocrats of the Missouri Valley Indians.

While not the best examples of robe making, the Crow robes were beautiful in workmanship, while as for the quantity the nation was the best producer of all the plains tribes. Bridger did not intend to transport the robes to St. Louis if he could possibly help it, and yet he planned to turn the trade to a good account.

After the robes were traded the Indians received many flattering offers for some of their horses. They refused to part with any of their animals with the exception of Black Arrow's offer of two ponies for Lander's knife. Lander refused and Bridger told him he was foolish.

Papa Clair gravely protested:

"*Non, non,* M'sieu Bridger. If only a piece of sharp steel—yes. But it is more than a knife. It is one of a family of five knives. It makes the heart stout; it brings good fortune."

"It's —— good medicine. I'll give my rifle for it an' stand th' chance o' my medicine gettin' mad at it," spoke up Jim Baker.

Although much less superstitious than Baker there was the Indian's belief in medicine in Bridger, and he gravely offered Lander a hundred dollars gold for the weapon.

"It loses its medicine if it's sold," Lander explained.

Papa Clair heard these offers with much uneasy tugging at his mustaches. After the Indians had withdrawn he said:

"M'sieu Bridger, M'sieu Baker, you are my old friends. Now behold—I have four knives, all of the same family. I can not give a pointed weapon away. I can not sell it, as that kills its soul. But see! I will let each of you have one of the knives. Yes, I will do that. Whenever I want them back, if you have not lost them, I will ask and they become mine.

"They are very jealous. You must carry no other knife in the same belt. Best to wear them in the boot. And they are still mine."

"Derned if ye ain't all right!" joyously cried Baker. "My medicine didn't oughter rip an' tear s'long as it's only lent to me. If ye ever want any ha'r raised jest call on Jim Baker."

Bridger, less demonstrative, caught the old man's hand and shook it warmly. It surprized Lander to see two such stout fighting men willing to attribute fetish powers to a piece of steel. He understood Papa Clair's sentiment concerning his knives and he catered to it. But here were two veteran mountain men eager to pay a rare price for what after all was a well-sharpened knife ornamented with silver.

Bridger interrupted his meditations by abruptly offering him four hundred dollars a year if he would return with the Crows to their home in the Big Horn Valley and live with them during the Winter and collect their trade for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

"They like you. They reckon you're big medicine. Your knife has brought you good luck."

Lander hesitated and Bridger urged:

"You can't go back to St. Louis. You've got to Winter out here somewheres. They'll treat you mighty fine, and you'll have a chance to prove that Jim Bridger didn't tell no lies when he talked about the Yallerstone country."

"If you go then I shall go with you, my friend," added Papa Clair. "Caves of war-paint! Name of a pipe!"

And his eyes glittered at the thought of new adventures in the marvelous country Bridger had so often described.

Lander wanted above all things to return to St. Louis in the Fall. To go until another Summer without seeing Susette was sickening to contemplate. Yet a dead man and the inimical shadow of the A. F. C. barred his homeward path.

"I'll think about it," he sighed. "I suppose it's the only thing I can do."

"I'll throw in a whole suit of black broadcloth—the best you can buy in St. Louis," added Bridger.

"It's a trade," sighed Lander, "unless my knife-medicine makes it possible for me to go back to St. Louis."

BRIDGER was highly pleased. He had reached the rendezvous ahead of the A. F. C. outfit and had secured the cream of the trade. He had made the Upper Missouri outfit admit his importance by sending their men to head him off and to compete with him. Now by extraordinary luck he stood in position to secure the bulk of the rich Crow trade. While enjoying these delectable feelings one of his men rode up and announced a small band was coming down the river with a white man in the lead.

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"They'll be the A. F. C. outfit," said Bridger, and he smiled broadly.

"Rich pickin's they'll git," snorted Baker.

"I'm glad they've come," said Bridger. "I had them in mind while Lander was trading in the Crow robes for me. I don't want to pack 'em to St. Louis. The A. F. C. outfit will take 'em back to Fort Union rather than go empty-handed. Want to come along, Lander?"

Lander flushed with pleasure at the honor of this invitation and mounting his mule followed his chief up the river to meet the newcomers. There were a score of Indians, full bloods and breeds, in the outfit. One white man rode in advance. On beholding Bridger and Lander he spurred ahead to great them.

Lander gave a loud cry and nearly fell from his mule. Bridger reined in and stared in amazement.

"Malcom Phinny!" he ejaculated.

"No one else," replied Phinny, smiling genially.

A wonderful wave of joy suffused Lander's whole being. By some miracle the dead was alive. The path to St. Louis and Susette was open. This tremendous discovery that no homicide was charged against him forced him to forget his rancor against Phinny. Never had he been so pleased to meet a man.

"Thought you was dead," he faltered.

"Head's thick," Phinny good-naturedly replied. "Bullet creased my skull. Unconscious for a bit. Men thought I was done for. I took the company's boat right after that fool Tilton went up on the *Golden Queen* to bother you. It was a fair fight and what he did wasn't any of my doings. I don't bring any quarrel up here against you. How's trade, Mr. Bridger?"

"Fair—I've got some mighty fine Crow robes you can have if you want 'em."

"Robes are good, but we're after beaver."

"Don't seem to be much beaver left. You oughter got here sooner."

Phinny swore and in deep disgust complained:

"That's what I told Mr. McKenzie, but he was so sure I'd be in time he held me back. What'll you take in trade for the robes?"

"Beaver, or an order on your St. Louis office for cash."

"Then it'll have to be an order at the market price. And, Lander, I'm really glad to see you. There's no fight between us, I repeat, so far as I'm concerned."

"I'm glad I didn't kill you. Let it go at that."

"Fighting is all foolishness. I've learned my lesson and now know what sort of a fool I've been. But don't it beat the devil how Mr. Bridger gets all the beaver?"

"First come gits it," said Bridger. "If I built a post near Fort Union Kenneth McKenzie would run me out in one season. But when he chases me through the mountains he's playing my game. I'll show you the robes. They're extry fine."

Phinny fell back with his outfit and Bridger rode on to camp with Lander and his face was grave and thoughtful. Lander was impelled to say:

"What's the matter? They can't get anything. You've cleaned up every skin."

"I've been waiting for 'em to come an' take the robes off my hands. But the feller with Phinny—the guide—notice him?"

"Indian, and a filthy one."

"He's old Deschamps—Red River half-breed. Came to the Missouri from the Pembina country four years ago. Killed Governor Robert Semple in the Red River massacre back in 'sixteen. He's robbed Fort Union twice and makes a practise of robbing and whipping Injun trappers. Doesn't hesitate to kill 'em when he 'lows he won't git caught—bad devil.

"Ten in his family. Three are grown-up sons—all bad. They trail round with another breed outfit—Jack Rem's family.

"The A. F. C. made a great mistake when they brought those cusses to the Missouri to act as interpreters to the Assiniboins an' Crees. Young Phinny better keep his eyes open if he travels much with a Deschamps."

Papa Clair was astounded and much displeased when Lander broke the news to him. Finally his old face lighted and his frosty blue eyes began to sparkle.

"It can be done!" he rejoiced. "Name of a knife! It will work out after the wish of one's heart. He is here. You want your satisfy. He must challenge you. I will see that he does. This time it shall be with cold steel."

"But there's no cause," protested Lander.

"There is; he is alive. You suffered much, thinking him dead. You were attacked and forced to flee. He is responsible. Leave it to me."

"No, no, Papa Clair. No more duels for me. I'm mighty glad he is alive. He's glad too. Admits it's foolish to bring a fight up here. Now there is nothing to stop me going back to St. Louis."

"No more duels!" gasped Papa Clair. "Name of a dog! It is good I am near the end of the trail. When I was young—bah!"

For some minutes he brooded on the decadence of the times, Lander humbly waiting for him to speak. Finally he showed some of his old spirit and philosophically declared:

"After all it is the fashion. It can be done. Men make high names by exploring. If they are called liars they can challenge. At least our Winter in the Big Horn Valley will give us the chance to prove whether M'sieu Bridger spoke true or false.

"We will go to the Yellowstone. If we do not find the cave of war-paint I will challenge Bridger. *Sacré Bleu!* Is one to listen to such stories if they be false?"

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"Papa Clair, don't you see there is no longer any need of my wintering with the Crows? I am free to return to St. Louis," reminded Lander.

With a groan of disgust Papa Clair turned aside and lamented: "Ever so! M'm'selle's eyes outshine the torch of glory; the torch of power.

"Well, well. Come, old man. One must have been a fool to be wise. Huh! Is it for you to talk? And behold, M'sieu Bridger will be the disappoint."

Lander surmised as much and it was with considerable misgivings that he went in search of his chief. He found him completing the transaction of the robes with Phinny. He waited until Phinny superintended the carrying away of the robes, but before he could speak another interruption occurred. This was a wo-begone looking man, who announced he had just arrived from down-river.

"If you want a good man I'd like to hire out with you. I'm Ferguson of the H. B. I do not want to go back to headquarters. Blackfeet robbed me of forty packs of beaver. Once before I lost the season's furs."

"Lucky they didn't take your hair," said Bridger. "I'm afraid I can't hire you except as a trapper. I'll give you credit for an outfit."

Lander tugged Bridger's arm and drew him aside and whispered:

"Send him after the Crow trade. Seeing that I didn't kill Phinny I'm going back to St. Louis in the Fall."

"The —— you are!" exploded Bridger. "What am I paying you wages for?"

"Then I must go without any wages."

"How? I have no mules to spare for men who quit me."

"Then I'll walk."

Bridger grew calmer and studied him sharply. "It's the little girl, I take it," he finally remarked. "Old Hurry-Up Parker's girl."

Lander confessed by coloring highly. Bridger frowned and pursed his lips. Abruptly he said:

"I've seen her. 'Bout as big as a kitten. She's turned your head. I don't blame you. You're a fool but you've got a mighty pretty excuse.

"See here, Ferguson, I can use you after all. You shall winter with the Crows and bring their hunt here next season. I'll take all their robes, but it's beaver I want. Git 'em after beaver. I'll draw up the papers later and Baker will git up your equipment."

"Thank you, Mr. Bridger. Perhaps you can give me a writing, saying I lost my furs to the Blackfeet. I'll send it to Fort Union by Mr. Phinny where one of the Red River breeds can take it up the Saskatchewan post. If the Blackfeet take the furs there in trade the company can seize 'em, as my marks are on the packs."

"I'll give you the writing," agreed Bridger. "Why not put in it a agreement between me an' you as agent for the company, that if by any chance or risk I manage to git the furs back from the Blackfeet I pay the H. B. ten per cent. an' keep the rest. I don't stand a chance in a million of gettin' 'em. An' the H. B. has lost 'em for good."

Ferguson was eager to assent to this proposition, as he well knew the H. B. otherwise would never see the value of a single skin should the packs be recovered by any English or American traders. During the course of the day the agreement was drawn up and signed and given to Phinny, who promised to send it by express to the Saskatchewan post. This done, Ferguson was duly employed as Crow agent for the Rocky Mountain Company.

LANDER walked on air as he moved about the camp and visualized his return to St. Louis. Hurry-Up Parker's hostility was forgotten. He had proved himself to himself and now felt confident to look any man in the eye. He had made the trip to the mountains. He would go to Susette and, with her father's consent, determine the date of the wedding day. Parker would probably insist on a probationary term spent in the services of the A. F. C. Very good—he would reenter the employment of the A. F. C. and make good.

"Asleep?" broke in a voice.

Lander looked up and blinked at Phinny. The A. F. C. representative remarked:

"I've spoken to you three times. Say, I'm regular dished on this trip. Mr. McKenzie will feel like shipping me back to St. Louis for not getting here ahead of Mr. Bridger.

"But what could I do with that —— breed to guide me; and he smuggling along some rum and getting drunk before we was clear of the Yellowstone and being laid up sick? He swore the Assiniboins put poison in his liquor before we quit the fort. Blames it on to old Gauche."

"He'll be mad because you didn't git here in time to make some of the trade?" asked Lander sympathetically.

"Like it? I'll probably be put back in that —— store or sent down to Cabanne's post to handle what's left of the Pawnee trade. I'll be lucky if I'm not kicked out entirely. Mr. McKenzie is much worked up at the way Mr. Bridger is getting the beaver. The robes will help a little, only it'll be mighty hard work getting them back to Union."

Lander began to pity him. Also he disliked the idea of Phinny's returning to St. Louis. The man wanted to stay at Fort Union, and that was the one spot on earth Lander wished him to locate in permanently. Phinny continued:

"There is a chance for me to make good in a small way. One of the free trappers told my breed guide that he has a small cache of beaver

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three days up the river. If I can trade for them my trip won't seem so much of a failure. I'll make Mr. McKenzie think I traded them right out from under Mr. Bridger's nose.

"The trapper's mad at Bridger for refusing him credit, so the R. M. F. can't get them anyway. It's either the A. F. C. or that outfit of Connecticut Yankees under Wyeth. I'm going for them and I don't want to take any of my own men as they might blab at the fort that I got them easy instead of getting the best of Mr. Bridger in open trade. My breed will guide me.

"One of your men, Porker, is willing to go with me if Mr. Bridger is willing. If you'd go along you'd be helping me out a lot—Lord knows you ain't got any reason to feel friendly toward me."

"That's all right," said Lander, eager to help him establish a secure standing at Fort Union, yet scarcely relishing the trip. "Porker wouldn't dare go without the boss's consent; neither would I."

"That's just the reason why I come to you. I want you to put it up to Mr. Bridger. If he'll let you two men go I'll return to Union with a bit of credit as a trader, and when Mr. Bridger wants to trade more robes he'll find me the man to deal with."

"Would you go and return inside of six days?" mused Lander.

"Easy. Good trail, the breed says, and the man's waiting to turn them over."

Lander placed the proposition before Bridger, who smiled in deep amusement at Phinny's naive confession—that he wished to appear as outwitting the head of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in a matter of trade. It was characteristic of his kindly heart that he should readily consent, saying:

"If it'll help him any—yes. I owe him a good turn for taking the robes. They'd been —— an' repeat to pack to St. Louis. Call it a holiday and go with him.

"Long Simons says there is no signs of hostiles within fifty miles of us. Baker isn't so sure, but his Snake friends have been reading their medicine and filling him up. Too many friendly Injuns and trappers here for the Blackfeet to be sneaking round.

"It's Bill Tracy who's got the furs. There's eight or ten packs, and the R. M. F. isn't passing 'em by ordinarily. He's sore because I wouldn't let him have a keg of liquor on credit. I offered an outfit, but he wanted the rum.

"He offered the cache to the New England outfit, but Wyeth was suspicious an' wouldn't dicker unless the packs was fetched in here. Take a mule an' go ahead."

"Can Papa Clair go with us?"

"No, siree! Think I come up here to work for the A. F. C.? You can go as you're not any help just now. Papa Clair is always a help. An' be back at the end of the sixth day or you'll find us gone.

"We're 'bout to split up into small parties. The A. F. C. will try to tag us round, and I may make a jump clear into the Blackfoot country. Then let them follow an' lose their hair."

Lander said nothing about Porker. Bridger's tone did not invite further requests. Very possibly Phinny had agreed to pay Porker well and the man would undertake the trip without permission. But that was Porker's affair. Returning to Phinny he reported the results of his mission and reminded him that he must be back in six days.

"We can make it easy. I've already started old Deschamps ahead to make the packs ready for the mules. He took two mules besides the one he is riding. His trail will be easy to follow if Porker can't go.

"Sorry you didn't ask about Porker, but Mr. Bridger might have said, 'No.' You don't care if Porker goes without asking?"

"Nothing to me as I don't know anything about it. If he goes I shall take it for granted he got permission," said Lander with a smile.

Papa Clair and Long Simons were about to depart in search of beaver country along the various small tributaries of the Green. Lander wished he were going with them. Jim Baker was visiting the Snake Indians, now camped ten miles below the rendezvous. Clair and Simons did not suggest that Lander accompany them, and he did not feel called upon to speak of his trip with Phinny.

The man Porker was busily cleaning his rifle and sharpening his knife and gave Lander a knowing glance. There was no doubt about Porker making the trip to Tracy's cache.

THE first night out was very warm. The men had not bothered to bring any tent, and although a canvas is but a frail protection Lander wished he had something for shelter. Porker laughed at him. Phinny smiled more politely.

"It's the wolves," Lander explained, feeling sheepish because of his squeamishness.

"Wolves!" guffawed Porker. "A mountain man don't keer a cuss for all th' wolves this side o' Tophet."

"Old mountain men tell me the wolves are quite harmless unless starving," Phinny said.

"I'm not entirely an idiot," assured Lander with a laugh. "I'm not afraid of wolves that act natural. But several times today when I was riding behind, one big fellow almost passed under my horse and took a snap at my heel. He was too fat to be hungry, but he was keen to bite. Now wolves don't act that way."

Porker's merriment vanished and he glanced uneasily about their camp.

"Mad wolf—that's what he was," he mumbled. "They do git pestiferous this time o'

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year. Two seasons ago they bit a bull that belonged to th' A. F. C. outfit. We was bringin' up th' bull an' six cows. Bull went mad. —— if I wanter see any sight like that ag'in!"

"I thought that was all stuff," said Phinny, peering anxiously about. "Must be wolves that's hungry."

"No, sir!" emphatically denied Porker. "They'll go right by dead buf'ler. All they wanter do is to bite something. I was with a outfit on th' Sweetwater when a big gray feller sneaked into our camp an' bit th' stock. We had tents an' —— if he didn't come into one tent three times in one night. We had orders not to shoot; th' boss thinkin' we'd kill each other, or th' mules.

"Twice th' fellers drove him out with heavin' things at him, but th' last trip they was all asleep, and he chewed George Holmes on th' ear 'n' face somethin' cruel. Holmes begin to say he was goin' mad. Got so bad he wouldn't cross water till we'd covered him with blankets. Then one day he had fits, an' that night threw away his clothes an' run off, an' was never seen since."

"Don't!" shivered Lander. "I'll sleep in a tree if you keep on."

"Yes, that's enough," growled Phinny. "Lucky if they don't git in and bite the mules."

"If they try that they'll be lucky not to have their derned heads kicked off. We'll keep a fire an' stand watch. Fire won't skeer 'em if they're mad, but it'll give a light to shoot by."

It fell to Lander to stand the first watch and he was glad as he was too nervous to sleep. He patrolled back and forth for an hour, pausing only to replenish the small fire, and then sat down satisfied the night would pass without any intrusions.

Something whitish-gray, moving noiselessly so far as his ears were able to register, passed by him and toward the mules. For a second he believed it was imagination; then the mules set up a fearful braying and kicking, and thinking he glimpsed the furtive shape he discharged his rifle.

Phinny and Porker came to their feet and snatched up their weapons.

"What is it?" roared Porker.

"Wolf!" yelled Lander, rushing toward the mules and expecting to find the terrible visitor dead. But he could not find even a drop of blood.

His companions swore fretfully as he returned to the fire, and insisted he had dreamed it. Lander angrily asked if they believed the mules also had dreamed it. But his companions had heard only the rifle-shot and believed it was that which frightened the mules.

"Jest tuck this inter yer pipe an' smoke it," warned Porker. "No more shootin' in this camp. Ye'll be pottin' either me or Phinny next. It's all right to heave a ax, but this sprinklin' lead round every time ye have a bad dream——"

"Oh, shut up! If you two say not to fire—all right, I won't fire. But if you get nipped don't blame me."

"We certainly haven't any right to find fault with you," mollified Phinny. "Reckon we're all rather nervous. Only thing I heard was the shot, then the mules, and it scared me blue. But we'll all agree to shoot off no guns in camp. It might fetch some small band of Injuns down on us."

Irritated at the fault-finding, Lander sullenly completed his watch and aroused Porker. The latter asked if there had been any signs of a wolf, and Lander growled a negative. Porker lighted his pipe and took his turn. When he called Phinny it was growing light in the east.

"Reckon ye won't have much to do," yawned Porker, returning to his blankets.

PHINNY walked about until thoroughly awake; then discovered the mules were acting uneasy and went to them. As he came up they milled about and lashed out with their heels. Something darted by him and he leaped aside and heard, or fancied he heard, the click of poisonous teeth. In another moment Porker screamed and staggered to his feet, firing his rifle blindly and sending the ball near Phinny's head.

"You fool! Trying to kill me?" roared Phinny.

"Oh, God!" cried Porker, whirling frantically about. "Th' wolf bit me! Now I'll go mad!"

"Nonsense!" yelped Phinny, his voice quavering with fear.

Lander came out of his blankets and taking in the situation demanded—

"Let me look at you."

He turned Porker about and felt the massive form trembling violently. There was no doubt but that something had bitten him, for his chin was covered with blood. Lander stirred up the fire, threw on some dry stalks and washed the blood away and found the marks of teeth. Thrusting a ramrod into the fire, he heated it and cauterized the wounds, and encouraged him.

"It's nothing. Skin barely broken. You'll be all right. Probably some kind of a rat."

Phinny knew better, but held his tongue. As the day broke he secretly studied the mountain man as if expecting to behold immediate symptoms of hydrophobia. Under Lander's cheerful encouragement Porker recovered his composure and affected to have no fears. Yet when he filled his pipe his big hands trembled, and more than once he sought to study his lacerated face in pools of water.

Their course lay up the Green, and they found the traveling easy with a broad trail left by Deschamps and his mules. The finding of several broken arrow-shafts told them it was a

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thoroughfare for the Indians. Porker examined the shafts and said they had weathered for at least one season.

Throughout the day Porker was normal in his bearing, but toward sundown he became silent, which was not characteristic of him. Once a gray form flashed across the trail ahead and he shook in a paroxysm of fear. However, he managed to keep his nerves well under control. He bolted his supper hurriedly and although it was his turn to stand the first watch he rolled up in his blankets.

"He's powerful scared," whispered Lander. "You wake me for the second watch and we'll let him sleep through. A full sleep will fix him all right."

This was done and Lander found nothing to disturb his dreams of Susette until near morning. He was half-way through the extra watch and thinking of the girl, marking time until it should grow light enough for him to start the breakfast, when a dirty gray form flashed from cover and streaked toward the camp. Instinctively his rifle flew up and discharged, and the gray patch took to the air and came down within a few feet of Porker. Both Porker and Phinny sprang erect at the shot.

"I got him this time!" cried Lander, pointing.

It was a big gray wolf, and its jaws, agape, were hideous to contemplate. This time neither of his companions found any fault with his shooting.

"Same feller that nipped me," shuddered Porker. Then hopefully—

"Some say ye ain't in any danger if ye kill th' cuss."

"That's right," heartily agreed Lander. "Besides, I burned all the poison out."

"I don't count much on th' burnin'. Took too long for th' iron to heat. What ye oughter done was rub in gunpowder an' touch it off. Wal, I'm derned glad he's dead, an' let's be gittin' away from here."

It was with difficulty that they induced him to wait until they had eaten. He refused to touch any food.

"Eat something," insisted Phinny.

"—— ye, I ain't hungry!" snarled Porker, striding to the mules and beginning to saddle up.

Phinny looked at Lander inquiringly.

"I don't know any more than you do," said Lander. "Bridger and Baker say mad wolves will pass by food and seem keen only to bite something. I don't even know that that dead brute was mad; or if he was if he's the same one that bit Porker. But if Porker gets to thinking things hard enough he'll go mad."

THEY mounted, and Porker, contrary to his usual custom, rode some distance ahead of his companions. According to Lander's reckoning they were almost up to the cache.

Phinny watched Porker steadily. It was easy to read Phinny's mind by watching his eyes. He was afraid of the big man ahead. Porker, usually so gregarious, now seemed loath to come near them, and when Lander did manage to ride abreast of him and manage to catch his gaze he saw that which made him willing to drop back with Phinny.

Near sundown a man came galloping a mule down the river-bank. Lander covered him with his rifle, but Phinny called out:

"Don't shoot! It's old Deschamps!"

The breed came on, his wily eyes instantly detecting constraint in the three men. He glanced askance at Porker, who kept to one side and made no move to join his mates. In an undertone and speaking rapidly Phinny explained what had happened.

"Bad," grunted Deschamps. "Better kill 'um." And he fingered his gun.

"No, no!" hissed Phinny. "He'll be all right if he gets over his scare."

Deschamps, who understood English much better than he could speak it, nodded his head slowly. Lander, who was anxious to have done with the disagreeable trip and its possible tragedy, asked—

"How far to the cache?"

Deschamps eyed him stolidly as if not understanding. Phinny repeated the query sternly. With a sullen duck of his head the breed held up one finger.

"One day!" cried Lander in disgust. "It won't do. We should be turning back tomorrow."

"One sleep," corrected Deschamps.

"Means we can camp here tonight, raise the cache tomorrow and start back," said Phinny. "It must be near as he has left the pack-mules there."

"Sleep, then go. Mules there," grunted Deschamps.

They called to Porker and told him their plans. He made no reply but hobbled the mules. He made no offer to help with the evening meal, but after some meat had broiled he seized a portion and withdrew and attacked it ravenously for a few minutes; then seemed to lose his appetite.

Suddenly he began to laugh, not his usual boisterous guffaw, but a strident, interminable cackling with a peculiar metallic quality in his voice. Lander was frozen with horror, and Phinny stealthily reached for his rifle. Old Deschamps effaced himself in a clump of bushes.

"What's the matter, man?" sharply demanded Lander. "Stop it and light your pipe."

"Light my pipe, ye pasty-faced pet o' Jim Bridger's," croaked Porker, twisting his thick lips in a most grotesque manner as if each word had to be dislodged by force. "By this time tomorrer I'll be lightin my pipe in —— an' yer ha'r'll be hangin' in a Blackfoot lodge."

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"Shut up that fool talk!" shrilly commanded Phinny, drawing the gun to his side.

Porker was seized with a convulsion of laughter. His mirth was titanic and of a horrible quality. Pointing a quivering finger at the dazed Lander he shrieked:

"Ye poor fool! Tried to make it hot for me in Bridger's outfit, eh? Wal, here ye be only a few feet behind ol' Porker when he takes th' long trail.

"Goin' back to St. Louis, be ye? Yer hide will be tanned by Blackfoot smoke. They'll find me mad as th' mad wolf what bit me. They'll find ye——"

Phinny fired and Porker went down on his face.

"Why did you do that?" gasped Lander, breaking into a clammy sweat.

"He's gone mad!" panted Phinny, working with desperate haste to reload. "It was his life or ours."

"He said they'd find me—wish he'd finished," muttered Lander.

"Crazy talk. Hand me that ramrod," puffed Phinny, his hands shaking.

Lander stooped and reached for the ramrod. The bushes stirred and he started to lift his head. Then a crash and nothingness.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE MEDICINE LODGE

WHEN Lander came to his senses he was hanging across a pony, unable to move a limb, and the rapid motion of the animal caused him exquisite torment. His head felt as if it were about to burst and he tried to twist it up to relieve the blood-pressure.

There was the sound of many horses around him and it was night. There was a great roaring in his ears that was not made by nature or his unseen companions.

Finally he caught the guttural voices of Indians and vaguely comprehended his plight. Phinny had shot Porker; then the Indians came from ambush and knocked them in the head. Whether Phinny was a captive or dead he had no idea.

The Crows would rob white men but were loath to kill them. The fact he had been struck down by some blunt instrument and not permanently harmed suggested Crows as his captors. But he could not believe they were from Black Arrow's band. The chief expected him to Winter with the tribe and would gain nothing by making him a prisoner.

Also there were Nez Percés, Flatheads and Snakes in and about the rendezvous; but these tribes were friendly with the whites and seldom bothered them even when engaged in tribal wars. This left the Blackfeet, who were known to be gathered near the Three Tetons in great numbers, and who doubtless were sending small bands down the Sweetwater and Green to pick off stray victims.

He decided he must be in the power of the Siksika, or Blackfeet. Even a store-man in St. Louis must know the history of this tribe's unrelenting hatred for Americans. The bulk of Kit Carson's Indian fights were with these people. The Sioux tribes and their treacherous tenants, the Aricas, were bad enough, but with these tribes there were lulls—peaceful intervals when boats ascended the river without being attacked.

Not so with the Blackfeet. To meet an American band of trappers was the signal for battle. They carried their trade to the H. B. posts in Canada, or turned them over to outposts below the national boundary line. With the Americans they would have nothing but war.

Bridger and his associates usually spoke of their country as the "butcher-shop," and what beaver was taken above the Milk was usually accompanied by running fights—the white men retreating.

If the Blackfeet denied themselves trade privileges with the American traders they were never tempted, as were the Assiniboins, to exchange all their robes for diluted alcohol in weather when Indians ponies froze to death standing up. If they lost warriors by white men's bullets, they lost less than many other tribes did through disease. Lander knew if he was a captive of this terrible people he stood no chance of being adopted or ransomed, but must die beneath all the torture his captors' hideous ingenuity could provide.

He groaned dismally, and instantly a hand rested on his neck. Soon the ponies came to a halt and he was untied from his mount and dumped on the ground like a pack of skins. With the breath knocked from his body and in imminent danger of being trampled on in the darkness, still he felt immeasurably better as the blood cleared from his head.

No attention was given him except as some man ran his fingers over his person to make sure the thongs were secure. Next the ponies were led to one side and the warriors threw themselves on the ground, and the camp became quiet. Lander worked at his bonds only to find the slightest movement brought a hand fumbling at the knots.

As he persisted the edge of a knife was placed against his throat. After this threat he remained very quiet. Despite his fears and tortured position he dozed off at last, and when much commotion aroused him it was early morning and his captors were preparing to resume their journey.

The expedition was in command of the Blackfeet military organization, the Ikunuhkahtsi—All Comrades—and the strictest obedience was

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given the orders of the leader. This man was short and thick-set, and wore several necklaces of grizzly-bear teeth.

No attention was paid the prisoner until after the men had eaten. Then he was jerked to his feet and thrown astride a horse. Neither food nor water was offered him.

Once he had gazed about, his stomach revolted at the thought of food. Around the necks of several horses, and including his own mount were tied the freshly severed hands and feet of Indians. The band had been in a fight with some of the plains tribes and were bringing home the trophies. The leader carried a tall lance, and tied to the top of this were several scalps. They rode due north toward the Gros Ventres Range, making for the heart of the mountains. Suffering horribly from thirst but not daring to ask for water, Lander clenched his teeth and stared straight ahead, trying to hold his head high that his gaze might escape the gruesome decorations around his pony's neck.

Although he did not know it this bearing favorably impressed his captors, who interpreted it as the index of a high and haughty spirit. Had they realized it was due to a weak heart and faint stomach they probably would have slain him on the spot.

AT MIDDAY they halted at a water-hole and a warrior held up a leather bucket filled to the brim, and motioned for Lander to drink. As he eagerly accepted the invitation the bucket was placed upside down on his head. He fell from his horse and nearly choked to death. The joke was hailed with much laughter.

Desperate and only anxious to have it quickly over with, Lander forgot to be afraid, and bowing his head he butted his tormentor in the face, smashing his nose and lips and hurling him into the hole. The savage scrambled out and came at him with drawn knife. The leader yelled an order and several braves seized the infuriated man and held him back.

Then another warrior filled the bucket and allowed Lander to drink. In all his life he had never known such exquisite pleasure as when the ice-cold water filled his parched and feverish throat. Some jerked meat was next offered him, but he was unable to eat with his arms strapped to his sides.

The leader again spoke, and his cramped limbs were released. He had thought it impossible to eat fresh bull-meat in Bridger's camp; now he made short work of long strings of tough, bark-like substance. As he bolted the leathery ration he discovered he could look on the ghastly trophies without feeling squeamish.

He rode the whole afternoon without any great discomfort. Now that he had eaten and drunk he began to scheme to escape. They had deprived him of his rifle and belt, the latter containing a short skinning-knife. But they had not thought to remove his boots, and Papa Clair's long gift blade still reposed in its scabbard.

The day's journey terminated once the band had passed through a narrow cañon and had entered a circular pocket several miles in diameter. Here seemed to be a permanent camp, possibly the advance of the main body at the Three Tetons, seeking small bands of trappers before returning to the home country at the sources of the Missouri. That they had no fears of surprize attacks was shown by their relaxation once they came up to the skin tents, where the women rushed out to greet them.

The scalps were given to the squaws to dance and trample upon. The trophies were removed from the horses and elevated upon lances and poles and became centers of much derisive attention. The squaws attempted to get at Lander but were bundled aside by the men. He was unceremoniously thrown to the ground and pegged out in spread-eagle fashion.

After the kettles of meat had cooked, two warriors released his arms and allowed him to sit up and eat. He found the meat tender and savory despite the lack of salt. Suddenly become a fatalist, he decided he would die on a full stomach, and quickly devoured a large quantity. He was allowed to drink, then was thrown and pegged out.

While sitting up he had gained a glimpse of the camp and saw it was a large one. The leather tents were uniform in size and pattern. Directly behind him, and so near he could almost touch it with his outstretched hand, was an unusually large lodge, oblong in shape.

Night came abruptly to the pocket. Numerous small fires were lighted. Lander was watching the silhouettes pass between him and the fires when he was startled to hear a voice near his head sigh—

"Alas, *m'sieu!*"

"Papa Clair!" he softly ejaculated.

"Baptiste Gardepied—talk French?"

Lander eagerly asked in French—

"What will they do with me, M'sieu Gardepied?"

"Tomorrow. It will be very sad and cruel. May the Old Man give you strength."

"But you are not an Indian. What do you do here? Where are you?"

"I am in the big medicine-lodge. My mother was an Arapaho, my father a French trader. The Arapahoes are friends to the Blackfeet. I married a Blackfoot woman. I have worked at Fort Union, but came here when Deschamps and his rascal sons said they would kill me.

"The Blackfeet say it was Deschamps who brought them down on you. He met one of their scouts and said he would make a smoke signal to show your camp."

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"Deschamps? He betrayed me to the Indians? He was guiding Malcom Phinny——"

"Ah, M'sieu Phinny! He is one bad one. He is now at Fort Union, but he brought much news of Bridger. The A. F. C. do not like M'sieu Bridger's way of getting the beaver. If I were M'sieu Bridger I would never walk ahead of a Deschamps or a Rem."

"But if Deschamps betrayed me, then Phinny betrayed me," gasped Lander.

"But why not? Does M'sieu Phinny love you? When he came to Fort Union he was quick to get thick with Deschamps. It is said he will marry one of the old man's wildcat daughters when he returns to the fort."

"You must get me out of this," gritted Lander.

"It is my life if they know I cut your cords. It may be death if they knew I was in the medicine-tent. Not even the warriors dare come in here where they keep the sacred bundles. And if I cut you free you will be taken again."

"I have a knife in my boot. I know how to use it. I can die fighting and not at the hands of a squaw."

"*Psst!* Be quiet—some one comes."

Lander saw the figure approaching from one of the fires. The man dropped at his side and examined his bonds and made sure the pegs were holding. Then he rose and with a guttural exclamation struck the prisoner in the face. He hesitated after the blow, muttered fiercely, then turned back to the fire.

"—— him!" panted Lander through his bloody lips.

"He says you broke his nose," whispered Gardepied. "And—well, we shall see what we shall see. It will be better to die fighting, of course. Oh, much better!"

"What else did he say?" demanded Lander.

"He spoke of the green rawhide torture. As it dries it shrinks and holds like iron. They fasten the stone heads on their war-clubs with it. It is all too cruel to talk about. I am part Arapaho—I marry a Blackfoot woman. But I remember I am half white.

"Yes, it is much better for you to die fighting, *m'sieu*. The white blood in me says I must give you that chance."

"Then in God's mercy cut these cords," panted Lander, beginning a useless struggle.

"What would you have? Death now? Wait a bit. I must leave the medicine-tent and go to the fire and show myself and then go to my lodge. They will think I have turned in for the night.

"Then I will come back and reach from under the flap of the tent and cut your arms free. I can not reach your legs, but you say you have a knife. Use it, and make for the hole through the hills. I fear you will not get far, but knowing what I know, you will have much to thank Baptiste Gardepied for when you go down fighting."

"Do not fail me," mumbled Lander.

The breed no longer talked and Lander knew the medicine-lodge was empty. He closed his eyes and fell to thinking of Susette. Then came thoughts of Papa Clair, his friend; of Jim Bridger, generous and kind.

It was all clear to him now. Phinny had played him false, and had planned to do so from the start. Porker was in the scheme, and Phinny had killed him to prevent his tattling the truth.

Deschamps had joined the three white men and it was his hand that had reached from the bushes and struck Lander senseless. They had left him tied in the trail for the Blackfeet to find and kill by inches.

THE groups about the fires sang and danced, or listened to some warrior reciting his coups. None of the squaws ventured near the prisoner; he was being saved for the morrow's sport. At regular intervals a brave would come and examine his bonds.

He waited more than an hour for Gardepied to return; then exhaustion overcame him and he dozed. He was always conscious of the thongs tugging at his arms and legs, and yet he slept and woke up and slept again. After one troubled nap he opened his eyes and realized he had slumbered for some time.

Gray mists were rising from the pocket, and the tops of the western peaks were reflecting the first lights of dawn. With terrible dismay he realized the night had passed and that Gardepied had not given him his chance to die fighting.

He rolled his head in hope of glimpsing the form of the breed stealthily making a belated approach. With the exception of a dozen guards, who sat muffled in their blankets, the camp still slept.

As Lander rolled his head from side to side he was obsessed by the absurd fancy that a bush moved a few feet. He knew this was his imagination, yet he marked the position of the bush well before glancing to the opposite side.

Once more he saw a bush glide ahead. The miracle had happened on his right and left. He darted his gaze back to the first bush, and most surely it was advancing, or else he was out of his head. Not only that but bushes throughout the level floor of the pocket were shifting their positions.

One of the guards let his blankets fall to his loins and stared earnestly over the eastern side of the pocket. It was as if he had sensed danger. As the chill of early morning struck home he gathered the blanket about him and by degrees his head sank on his chest again.

Lander thrilled in anticipation of something about to happen. The floor of the pocket was dotted with isolated clumps of bushes and those growing singly. On both the west and east the

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miracle was being repeated and bushes advanced closer about the camp circle.

"*M'sieu!*"

It came as soft as the murmuring of the morning breeze.

Lander shook his head to show he was awake.

"Do not move when I cut the thong," came the warning.

Then the horrible drag on his right arm ceased, and he no longer felt as if it were being pulled from the socket. And, oh, the luxury of feeling it relax—of feeling the blood prickling through the veins to revive the benumbed hand! It required all his will power to refrain from flexing the muscles and hugging the outraged limb to his side.

But the guard was out of his blanket again and staring curiously over the plain. It seemed ages before he slipped back into his blanket. Then the heavenly relaxation of his left arm marked the completion of Gardepied's charity, or response to the call of his white blood.

Working his fingers until he had ousted the prickly sensation, Lander darted his right hand to his boot and pulled his knife. Rising and bending half double, he slashed twice and lay back, his legs free.

"Napi, the Old Man, help us! The bushes move!" gasped the voice of the breed.

A guard rose up, threw aside his blanket and stared sharply over the plain. Something caught his attention and he bent forward to scrutinize it more closely.

He straightened and threw back his head, but the streak through the air, beginning at the nearest bush and ending in his throat, permitted only a gasping, gurgling cry to escape his lips. However, another guard saw him fall with the arrow through his neck and yelled an alarm.

Instantly the bushes rose in the air, revealing human forms beneath them—warriors with bushes tied to their heads. A cloud of arrows hissed into camp and stung the sleepers, biting several to death; and the hoarse war-cry of the Crows completed the camp's dismay. On the west side of the pocket commenced the same mode of attack, while down at the mouth of the narrow cañon sounded the loud battle yell of white men.

With a backward squirm Lander gained the side of the medicine-lodge and raising a flap rolled inside. He heard a noise on the opposite side of the lodge, but could see nothing as the interior of the place was piled high with packs. Passing round the barrier he saw a flap fall in place, and peering out beheld the breed running north and away from the fighting.

Returning to the south side of the lodge, Lander cut a slit in the wall and beheld the camp in an uproar. The surprize attack had for a few minutes thrown the Blackfeet into a panic. Now they were recovering their morale. Some rushed to gather in the horses, but were beaten back by many arrows. On both sides the Crows began to increase the pressure.

The Blackfeet in two long lines faced in two directions. Their chief rode up and down between the lines, exhorting his men to die like warriors. The squaws, very demons, rushed back and forth, bringing fresh quivers, or darting out and dragging their wounded tribesmen inside the lines.

The Crows were now on the ground, still masked by the bushes. The Blackfeet ceased to fall back. One line suddenly rushed ahead, and Lander's heart jumped violently as he beheld the front of the bushes drawing back. But before the Blackfeet could score any advantage a flying mass of trappers struck the tips of the double lines, their rifles and pistols reechoing viciously.

Some of the squaws managed to bring up a few horses at the risk of their lives, and warriors mounted these and rode down to slow up the advance of the whites. One old hag with her gray hair streaming in the morning breeze remembered the prisoner, and with eldritch shrieks darted around the medicine-lodge with a knife in her skinny hand and dropped on her knees and raised the blade. She stared at the empty ground stupidly, then cried out with such malignant intensity as to make Lander's blood curdle.

Other women rushed up. Lander passed to the other side of the tent, thinking to escape, but found the Blackfeet in retreating had cut him off. The big lodge occupied the middle of the battle-ground and was now entirely surrounded. Turning to the packs and working with desperate vigor, Lander rearranged them in a high breastwork around him. As he finished his barricade the lodge coverings began to vanish as mounted horsemen paused long enough to salvage the sacred hides.

AN INDIAN with a swollen nose glimpsed Lander's head disappearing behind the packs, and with a howl of fury climbed up the barrier, a war-ax in his hand. For a few seconds the brave endured the white man's masterly knife-play, chopping ineffectively, then went down at the foot of the barricade and dreamed no more of battle.

Others of the Blackfeet had witnessed the brief duel, but there was none who had time to attack the prisoner. Now that his hiding-place was discovered Lander recklessly showed himself and waved his arms and yelled:

"Papa Clair! Jim Bridger! Jim Baker!"

"God is good!" cried Papa Clair, swerving his horse between two bucks and making for the stack of packs.

He rode with the reins in his teeth, almost with his knees in the saddle, a knife in each hand. And as he pressed forward he leaned far to right and left, his terrible knives etching a

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red trail. Emboldened by the coming of the whites, the Crows threw aside their head-coverings of bushes and advanced more boldly.

The Blackfeet were now awake to their danger and fought a vicious rear-guard action. Their chief was among the last to fall back. He kept taunting his enemies, and as his words were heard the Crows slightly lessened the impetuosity of their advance. Papa Clair leaped from his horse and joined Lander behind the packs and interpreted—

"The chief is telling us that there are eight hundred Blackfeet a short distance north of here, and that they will soon come and give us all the fight we want."

"This crowd is licked!" joyously cried Lander, hardly able to realize the sudden change in his fortunes.

"They're falling back in good order," corrected Papa Clair. "They even took the hide coverings of this, their medicine-lodge. By this time they've seen we have only thirty white men and that our Crows are losing stomach. We can't drive them far.

"Ah, hear the Crows! They've found the feet and hands of their people. The Blackfeet surprized a small party of Black Arrow's scouts and cut off their limbs. The Crows were on the trail when we overtook them.

"M'sieu Phinny and Deschamps brought us word of being attacked; of you and Porker being killed. M'sieu Baker had just come from the Snake camp. We came with what force we had."

"Where's Phinny and Deschamps?" asked Lander.

"Eh? Who knows? I gave them no thought once we got word you were killed."

CHAPTER X

AT FORT UNION

BRIDGER galloped up and silently wrung Lander by the hand. Jim Baker, intoxicated with joy, waved a big knife and yelled for Lander to catch a horse and join in the pursuit. But Bridger began shouting:

"We must turn back. There is a large party of Blackfeet near here. The old chief did not lie. We've got our man. Round up their horses. Land of life! What's these packs?"

For the first time he noticed the nature of Lander's barricade. Lander explained:

"I think they're the forty packs the Blackfeet took from Ferguson, the H. B. man. If he is here he can tell them."

"I'm glad to say he isn't here," said Bridger. He quickly examined a pack and announced:

"The H. B. pelts sure enough. Ferguson's mark is on 'em. Rustle for horses, boys; we'll use the mules for packing these to camp. Papa Clair, you and Lander see to loading them. I must crowd the fighting a little more. Git after 'em, Jim Baker. Give 'em their needin's, men. Take the fight out of 'em. We must have time to load forty packs of prime beaver."

"Ain't that younker's medicine all ——, Jim?" bawled Baker as he dashed away to force the fighting.

Under Papa Clair's direction Lander and a score of Crows rounded up what horses were not yet captured. The Crows had left their own animals outside the pocket, and now once more in the saddle they attacked the retreating enemy more confidently, their big bows twanging out the death sentence. And as they formed in a long line across the pocket the trappers fell back and exchanged their mules for ponies.

As fast as the mules were brought to him Papa Clair superintended the loading of them—two hundred pounds to each animal—and worked as serenely as he would have in the big camp. In short time the cavalcade began retiring toward the cañon; the trappers coming next with a screen of Crows to discourage counter-attacks.

The Blackfeet had lost virtually all their stock and were poorly situated for taking the offensive. Bridger called out to Black Arrow that he and his braves should have the bulk of the horses, but the chief seemed more interested in securing the poles of the medicine-lodge. The poles were lashed to ponies in form of a travois and on them was piled a miscellany of camp equipment. Jim Baker viewed the poles with considerable reverence and confided to Lander they were better medicine than all the horses and pelts.

The escape from the pocket was made without any confusion, but once the mules were through the narrow opening the Blackfeet made a vigorous charge, knowing the Crows must pass through the exit in a mass. Bridger wheeled about and led his mounted riflemen in a wild charge, and scattered and drove the enemy to the end of the pocket. This time the Blackfeet decided they had had enough of fighting and contented themselves with climbing the surrounding heights and making many smoke signals.

Since taking refuge in the medicine-lodge Lander had seen nothing of Gardepied. None of the trappers had seen him during the fight. Once back on the Green the horses were given to the Crows after Bridger had taken one for each of his men. As there were some three hundred animals, all in prime condition, the Crows' sorrow over the fate of their tribesmen was somewhat assuaged.

"You shall receive something worth while from the sale of the beaver," Bridger informed Lander.

"Good Lord! I'm satisfied with receiving my life back," shuddered Lander. "I shall never forget the women. They were terrible."

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"Leave it to me to fix the terms. An' speaking of women, when a man marries he likes to have something besides high hopes. We must show our heels a bit faster, boys."

"You think they'll be following us?" asked Lander anxiously, thinking of the chief's threat to bring eight hundred men.

"They'll follow when they can. What worries me is two white men—not the Blackfoot nation. I don't like the notion of having left Phinny and Ferguson in camp together."

As they rode down the river Lander related his experience to Bridger and insisted Phinny and Porker had planned his death.

"Don't doubt it," coolly agreed Bridger. "But Porker's dead an' we can't prove anything on Phinny. Treat him just as if you didn't suspect nothing. Time enough to pay him up after we git these packs to St. Louis."

When the band arrived at the rendezvous they found the Snakes and Nez Percés had flocked in to fight their ancient enemy if necessary. Phinny and Ferguson had departed. They had traded with Nez Percés for some crippled ponies and some mules and had packed the buffalo-robes on these.

They had started for Fort Union, having hired a score of the Nez Percés to act as bodyguard until in the heart of the Crow country. With the Nez Percés supplementing the Indians and breeds Phinny had brought with him, he would stand in no danger of an attack unless he encounted an overwhelming force.

The fact that Ferguson had gone with Phinny was very disquieting to Bridger. He immediately called Baker, Papa Clair, Long Simons and Lander to his tent and tersely explained the situation. In conclusion he said:

"Ferguson has gone back on his bargain to winter in the Crow country for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Phinny has offered him a good position with the A. F. C.

"Ferguson will be sure to tell McKenzie how he lost his furs to the Blackfeet and of his deal with me. McKenzie has an old man, Jake Berger, for a hunter. Berger used to work for the H. B. at their North Saskatchewan post—Fort of the Prairie. He got well acquainted with the Blackfeet, who carried their trade there. He is the one white man on the Missouri that can go to the butcher-shop and stand a chance of bringing his hair home.

"McKenzie will be sure to send him up the Missouri to dicker for the forty packs. As soon as Berger strikes any Blackfeet he'll learn about this fight and the loss of the packs.

"Now this is what we must do: I must reach Fort Union and buy a keelboat and have it ready for a flying start from the mouth of the Yallerstone before McKenzie can hear we captured the packs. So I will go ahead with Lander. As we shall go down the Big Horn we'll have the Crows for company most of the trip.

"Papa Clair with a dozen men will bring the pack-mules through the mountains to the Big Horn, where he will make bull-boats and fetch the packs down to the Yallerstone by water. He must arrive at night so's he can hide up the boats if I ain't all ready with the keelboat. When he takes to the water Long Simons will bring the mules back here.

"Baker will stay here and split the men into small bands and send them to their beaver grounds. Once I git the packs into a keelboat I'm off for Fort Pierre, where I'll turn 'em over to Étienne Provost to take down to St. Louis.

"Lander will go with Prevost, an' I shall come back here. I've made a square deal for the packs an' I'm going to take the profit. Now, Lander, pick a good horse while I have a talk with Black Arrow."

HALF an hour later Bridger and Lander, escorted by a band of Crows, started for the Missouri. Bridger allowed himself twelve days for making the Big Horn. Traversing South Path they struck the Sweetwater but followed it only for a short distance before striking off for Wind River, an upper reach of the Big Horn above the mouth of the Popo-agie.

They were now in the Crow country and did not have much fear of being molested. Following down the Big Horn Valley they saw no Indians except those of their party until within one day's journey of the Yellowstone, when they came upon four hundred lodges of Crows.

Black Arrow insisted they tarry and have a feast. He was very keen for his tribesmen to witness Medicine Knife's dexterity. But Bridger did not dare to pause for fear of arriving at Fort Union after Berger had brought news of the fight and packs to Kenneth McKenzie.

Some of the leading-men showed a disposition to prevent Bridger from proceeding, and began to act ugly. But Black Arrow was a man of influence, and when his men had displayed their wealth of Blackfeet scalps and told how many horses and scalps were to arrive, the white men were allowed to go on.

Bridger had expected Black Arrow to keep with him to the mouth of the Yellowstone, but the chief could not resist the temptation to cross to the village and participate in the great victory dance. In return for many trade goods to be delivered later the chief promised that none of his people would interfere with Papa Clair and his beaver-packs.

Bridger nearly exhausted his companions in the short dash for the Yellowstone. He feared lest the Crows attempt some mischief, not violence but the theft of their weapons or horses. However, nothing occured to disturb them, and except for their haste Lander would have enjoyed the trip immensely.

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The valley teemed with game and the traveling was easy. Reaching the confluence of the Big Horn and Yellowstone, Bridger chose the south, or right, bank, and without any unusual incidents pressed on until he had crossed the Rosebud and Tongue, when he passed to the north side of the river.

"What would happen if the Fort Union outfit learned we had the H. B. packs?" asked Lander on the last day of their trip.

Bridger chuckled grimly and replied:

"We wouldn't have 'em long if Kenneth McKenzie could help it. An' he's the king up here. He'd never let forty packs of prime beaver slip through his hands like that. He'd buy 'em, or take 'em.

"He'd show a paper from Ferguson, naming him agent for the H. B. He'd show a paper saying as how he had bought all title to 'em, with Ferguson signing it as the H. B.'s representative. If we held out he's charge us with stealing 'em an' lock us up until the beaver was under lock an' key, or on the way down-river.

"If we went into court in St. Louis an' proved our claim the A. F. C. would pay the price, minus the H. B.'s ten per cent. The A. F. C. has more power up here with the Injuns than the government has. So we must git the keelboat an' load it an' be off down-river the minute the packs come along.

"Don't you open your meat-trap while at the fort. Keep shet. Above all things don't start a row with Phinny. Warm up to him an' tell how glad you be he escaped.

"Don't wander away from the fort where old Deschamps can git a crack at you. I'll do all the talking, an' I won't seem to be in a hurry or look fussed up any. Kenneth McKenzie is a mighty hard man to fool."

By late afternoon they made the mouth of the Yellowstone. The channel was narrow and the water was low and they had no trouble in swimming their horses across to the north side of the Missouri. As they rode up the bank and came in sight of the solid pretentious structure of Fort Union, more persistently and intimately connected with the fur trade than any other post, Bridger whimsically remarked—

"You're almost eighteen hundred channel miles from the little lady in St. Louis, an' whether you see her soon or go back to the mountains depends on how strong your medicine works for you while we're up there."

He pointed to the fort as he spoke. And even to Lander, fresh from St. Louis, the fort seemed to reflect the indomitable will and iron power of the mighty American Fur Company, against which all opposition was waged and which was to destroy or absorb all opponents.

The stockade measured more than two hundred feet on a side, with the bastions at the southwest and northeast corners. These bastions were houses thirty feet in height, built of stone with the lower story pierced for cannon, and with a balcony around the upper story for the purpose of observation. The two travelers saw men on the northeast balcony, presumably watching them, for one hastily disappeared as if to announce their coming.

Bridger gravely watched the lone man on the balcony for a few moments; then with a shrug of the shoulders he assumed his careless, good-natured and devil-may-care expression and rode for the single gate. An *engagé* was on the point of closing this, but waited until they had entered.

In the middle of the huge square stood a seventy-foot flagstaff, and beside it were two cannon trained to cover the entrance. Surrounding the staff were the leather tents of the half-breed employees. At the rear of the square and facing the entrance stood the two-story house of Kenneth McKenzie, first king of the Missouri and the greatest bourgeois the A. F. C. ever had.

The house, like the other buildings inside the enclosure, was built of cottonwood. It boasted glass windows. Lander blinked in surprize. He had heard much about Fort Union in St. Louis, but was never able to draw an accurate line between fact and fiction. The powder-magazine, built of cut stone and having a capacity—as Bridger afterward informed him—of fifty thousand pounds, also increased his respect for his former employer.

There were well-equipped shops for the smith and carpenter and other workmen. There was an atmosphere of stability about the place. No wonder the Indians were slow to shift their allegiance to the flimsy post erected by the opposition, who in the river *argot* were known as one-Winter-house traders.

"I'm Jim Bridger. I want to see Mr. McKenzie," Bridger told the *engagé*.

"He is sitting down to supper, Mr. Bridger. Places have been laid for you," said the *engagé*. He called a breed to take care of the horses and led the way inside the fort.

HERE again the travelers found all the conveniences they would expect in the average inn back in civilization. As they were leaving the washroom the man joined them with two black coats, and apologetically informed:

"Mr. McKenzie's rule that every one shall wear a coat at the table, Mr. Bridger. I haven't any doubt but what he would let the rule go hang in your case, but if you don't mind slipping this on——"

"We'll be glad to wear 'em," cheerfully interrupted Bridger.

They were then conducted to the long room where McKenzie and his staff had their meals. McKenzie left the head of the table and greeted Bridger warmly. He spared a nod for Lander, but retaining Bridger's hand exclaimed:

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"If I'd had any notion it was you, Mr. Bridger, I should have rode to the river to meet you. Sit here at my right. Let the young man find a place among the clerks," and he pointed to the foot of the table.

Here was a greater caste distinction than Lander would have experienced in any household in St. Louis. The man were seated according to the rank of their occupation, and Susette's lover found himself decidedly below the salt and in the company of several harum-scarum youngsters going through their probation.

McKenzie was dressed in the St. Louis mode, and there was nothing in his carefully groomed and well-garbed appearance that could suggest the eighteen hundred miles between him and a civilized table. It would be several years before there would be even a rough settlement of whites above Independence.

What made an instant appeal to Lander and caused him to forget he was treated as being at par with the least of the staff was sight of the food. There were platters heaped high with tender, fat buffalo-meat. There were dishes of game birds and plenty of fresh butter, cream and milk.

However, and this was the only suggestion of stinting, there were only two biscuits at a plate. For although Fort Union might for a time run its own distillery in defiance of the law its bread ration remained something of a problem. To add the final glamour to the feast was the snow-white cloth covering the table and the two colored men in white jackets serving as waiters.

From the low chatter of his immediate neighbors Lander learned more details of how McKenzie played the dictator on the Upper Missouri. Being fond of lingering over his wine he went to bed late. It was late when he arose, and, worst of all, no one could have breakfast until he was up and ready to be served. So the morning meal was seldom eaten earlier than nine o'clock.

From the clerks' babbling Lander deduced that Phinny had never mentioned him at the fort. He was glad of this. He casually spoke of seeing Phinny at the rendezvous and was elated and much surprized to be informed that his old enemy had not yet returned from Green River. To get there ahead of Phinny impressed him as being the best of luck.

He talked shop with the young men and learned that the early Fall was the time for the jerked meat and tallow trade, the Indians taking hardly anything but liquor for this trade.

"But wait till old Berger fixes things with the Blackfeet," said one clerk. "Chief Good-Woman used to know him on the Saskatchewan and Berger's up there now, somewheres on the Marias. Berger's to be paid eight hundred dollars a year if he gets the Blackfeet to consent to our building a trading post on the Marias.

"You were lucky to get here without being robbed. A canoe band of Assiniboins, worst of that tribe and greatest thieves ever lived, started for the Crow country to steal horses. Don't see how you missed them."

But Lander was now all ears for the upper end of the table. McKenzie was saying:

"Mr. Bridger, here at Union alone last Winter we made four hundred and sixty packs of robes, and other peltries in proportion. Our outposts sent in thirty-five hundred pounds of powdered buffalo-meat and three thousand pounds of dried. Our run of fox was remarkable. Lamont and his men alone brought us forty-two hundred buffalo-robes from up-river."

Bridger kept on eating and nodded in approval. At last he took time to say:

"Fine if any one goes in for robes. I never bother with 'em. I sold your young man quite a few packs. Took his order on St. Louis for 'em. Don't see him here."

McKenzie looked surprized and asked to see the order. Bridger produced it and the nabob of the river read it carefully; then gravely informed:

"Perfectly correct, Mr. Bridger. I gave him authority to draw orders on St. Louis in case a man isn't coming here. Had he known you were coming to Fort Union he would have left the order for me to draw.

"I'm glad to have you turn the robes in to us. We deal in a big way. I'll get ten thousand robes from the Blackfeet next season.

"When I sent A. J. Tulloch to the Crows I told him to get them into the habit of trading—to trade them for anything they had. He went to the Yellowstone and some of his men were killed by a war-party of Blackfeet while they were chopping wood.

"He stuck and traded the Crows. His first returns made our men here laugh until they was sick. Hardly anything but elk and deer horns. Yet his trade on the whole was profitable because the A. F. C. can handle anything. That's why the Indians like us; we'll trade for anything they've got."

"Phinny isn't here."

"You must have passed him. Probably he was resting at the Crow village and arranging for the Winter trade. I'm glad to get the robes. Any time you have any we'll take them."

"I don't care to bother with 'em," Bridger carelessly assured. "All I'm after is beaver."

"We do quite a bit with beaver, and we shall do more. My man, Jacob Berger, is up visiting the Piegans. They're the best beaver-hunters among the Blackfeet, and as the opposition hasn't taken all the beaver above Milk River I'm expecting rather good returns from there."

"When does Berger git back?"

"Any time now."

"You'll be the first to git into their good

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feelings," said Bridger with a genial smile. "By the way, do you happen to have a keelboat in your *chantier* (navy yard)? I'd like to buy it if you have. I'll give a St. Louis order for it. It'll help cancel my order on you."

"Our *chantier* is twenty-five miles up-river, you know," slowly replied McKenzie, trying to imagine why Bridger, arriving without packs, should want a keelboat.

"I don't know just what we have there, or what condition it may be in. I might be willing to sell one. Of course we have use for all our boats, but I'd like to oblige you, as you'll some time be working for the A. F. C. Yes, Mr. Bridger, I'd go out of my way to oblige you."

"Mighty handsome of you," declared Bridger, spearing a half-pound piece of meat. "I've got one down at Fort Pierre. Seeing as how I must go down-river I thought I'd take it there to be loaded with any packs we may be sending across-country. We usually pack 'em into St. Louis on our mules. Étienne Prevost is there at Pierre waiting for me.

"Of course he can make bull-boats if it comes to a pinch. An' then again we mayn't need another boat. But I'd like to feel sure. Can use it anyway."

"Why not come in with us?" bluntly asked McKenzie.

"Mebbe I will. I'm hitched up pretty tight just now, but with no settled posts to hold us together I may be free before next season. Mighty nice place you got here."

"I pride myself on it, sir. We do not chase the Indians. The must bring their hunt to us. They fight among themselves but they never bother us. Big war-parties are always coming here. Sometimes they meet and fight outside. Sometimes they send word for us to keep in the fort so we won't be hurt.

"Old Gauche, the most feared and best obeyed chief of the Assiniboins for forty years, stopped here yesterday on his way from down-river where he went to put a fight on the Aricaras. His medicine must have lied to him as he was soundly whipped. He's had enough fighting for a while and promised to bring me in two hundred robes.

"Rather easy way to get trade, eh? Very comfortable quarters. Annual steamer bringing supplies and those little things it's hard to get when living off a mule's back."

And he illustrated his meaning by tapping the bottle of wine that stood between them. Then reflectively—

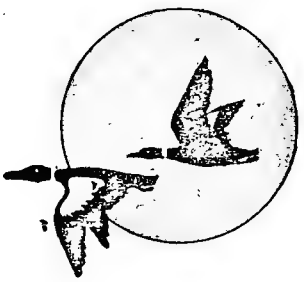
"If you care to ride up to the *chantier* and see what we have for a boat I think we could arrange it."

"Mebbe I will tomorrow or next day," said Bridger.

"There are three there, I believe. Take any one."

"That's very kind of you."

TO BE CONCLUDED



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The Gong-Beater

by ROY P. CHURCHILL

Author of "Remember the Raisin," "Esprit de Corps," etc.

YOU can wave a red flag at some bulls, and they'll keep right on eating grass, and you can break Navy rules once in a while and get away with it, but for a steady diet either one puts a man out of luck.

"Stormy" Jones had been flirting with trouble so long that he figured the old girl was asleep, or gone on furlough, and what was the use of reefing the topsails with no sign of squally weather. But all the time he was kidding himself. Payday was due and it had to come. Trouble was just waiting with a squilgee handle for Stormy to bend over.

Rufus Hollingsworth did look somewhat like a squilgee handle—long and narrow, and trying to clean up the world as squilgees do a quarter-deck. A flag-ship does hook some queer fish. The first the hash-marks forward and the gold braids aft knew, there he was, with his two trunks, all set in the admiral's spare room.

Some of the *Minny's* crew blamed it on the chaplain, but if the old man didn't want his living-quarters cluttered up with perishable freight, why did he want to hand Rufus's letter over to the Sky-Pilot and ask that good little fixer what he ought to do?

What Rufus should have had was a couple of lines telling him the matter would receive due attention, and the rest of the hot air these yeomen work out of their systems before they lose the papers out a port-hole.

But with sea-going ads making young fellows sit up and wonder how they would look in a wide-collared blue jacket and bell-bottomed pants, and with mother and dad holding a fist full of trumps and refusing to sign the paper so the boy can shove off and see the world, the chaplain comes back at the admiral and tells him it would be keen doings if they invite Rufus out to spend a week as a guest of the flag-ship *Mynton*.

"Mr. Hollingsworth is Chairman of the Consolidated Reform movement of the whole coast," says Chappy. "Get a boost from him and recruiting will pick up."

The admiral fell for it like a duty-struck marine does for a chance to put a gob on the report. He's sick of hearing the first lieutenant beef about being short-handed, and decides that the scheme is worth shooting at. The *Minny* has pulled down a couple of prizes for target practise anyhow, so why not this?

Pronto, the training begins, and the word is passed, stopping all arguments with the gloves on the forecastle, making cussing high treason and crap-shooting murder in the first degree.

"It can't be done," says "Hasty" Day when the news got to him through his division officer, and he hands it on to Stormy Jones. "It ain't natural to sea air. Even us boatswain's mates know nothing about the duties of a chaperon. Is a man gonna have to hide his pipe and smoke these ladylike cigarets?"

"It wouldn't kill you if you did," says Stormy. "You fellows on deck with half the ship to dodge around on gimme a pain. What's a signal boy gonna do with four feet of space to try and be good on?"

"Make up a new code with the flags," Hasty tells him. "There's some things this Rufus can't savvy. Do your devilment by signs."

FOR five days of the week everything is lovely. The *Minny* kind of takes the thing as a challenge and tries hard to put it across. The rest of the fleet quit laughing and wonder how they can hedge on a few quiet bets.

Rufus begins to spout about the lure of the sea and make wide hints to the admiral about what a boost he's fixing to turn in.

"Remarkable," he tells the Old Man. "I wouldn't hesitate to send my own son to such surroundings."

Then Stormy Jones comes down from a four hour watch and finds nothing has been saved for his breakfast except cold coffee and stale

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bread. It's fried bacon and stewed peaches on the menu, and nothing but a bonehead cook would have taken the chance, for Stormy has been smelling the bacon since daylight, and has had a lot of exercise waving the signal flags.

"Shake it up and rustle me a feed," says Stormy. "Some of you crazy cooks think you can hand the men on watch any old leavings you don't want. The dope sheet calls for a striped hog and yellow daisies. Get it, or I'll chase you to the officer of the deck."

"There's your chow; eat it or leave it," says the mess cook real sassy, thinking he's safe, and sore at all signal boys because they delay his cleaning up.

Stormy is hungry, and he's mad, and he's red-headed. He forgets about Rufus and strict orders, calls the cook a "pot-licking slob," and goes over the table after him.

The cook belongs to a new draft to the *Minny*, and he thinks he knows plenty about scrapping to handle Stormy Jones. They go at it over and under and around the mess table, and it isn't long until the cook collects considerable education and a black eye and begins pleading with Stormy to let him go and see if he can get him some breakfast.

Stormy lets him go. Breakfast right then is what he wants. But he forgets about it the next second, for in the door of the mess hall stands Rufus, and he looks like he'd found something he'd lost.

A two hundred pound marine sergeant gets Stormy by the scruff of the neck and hauls him to the top-side. Out comes the skipper and the first lieutenant, and by and by the admiral and Rufus. They slam Stormy into the brig for three days bread and water, and wonder if Rufus approves the quick action.

Rufus says nothing and keeps his note-book locked up. The chaplain talks to him pretty and tries to get a line on what sort of report he's going to make, but the only thing that Rufus lets go is that the outfit is a good deal as he expected to find it, so when Stormy gets out three days later he finds Rufus gone and everybody aft looking for a chance to soak it to him.

To make things happier, a new marine takes the admiral's bull-pup ashore and lets him get away from him. After that the *Minny* isn't any more a home than a coal collier is a thing of beauty, and they blame most of it on Stormy Jones, though the admiral takes some spite out on the chaplain for suggesting Rufus in the first place.

The old man thinks a lot of his dog Bruce and is real peevish when he fails to show up after an all-day search. Stormy gets some of this standing on the bridge rail and shooting red-hot messages ashore as fast as the admiral can talk, and by and by when he climbs down the admiral remembers something else and calls Stormy over to him.

"Jones," he says, "you and that dog of mine were good friends. I caught him sniffing under the door of the brig when I went by there on Sunday morning inspection. He's been up on the bridge enough to know you signal boys better than I do myself. Go ashore in the next boat and see if you can find him."

"Yes, sir," says Stormy, and hesitates just long enough for the admiral to remember something else.

"Let Signalman Jones have liberty until tomorrow morning at eight o'clock," he says to the officer of the deck, and Stormy makes a running jump for the ladder before somebody scrambles up all this good fortune.

Stormy hops into his best suit, gets his pass from the gangway officer and catches the five-ten boat as she shoves off. He is not figuring much on the admiral's dog, but he is happy to have an overnight liberty, when half an hour before he would have counted himself lucky to get a pleasant smile.

He's had a date for a week to take the girl he met in Channel City to a dance, and has had to stall along with notes and excuses. Of course if he happens to run into the admiral's dog, well and good, but Stormy is headed for Katie and the dance first of all.

Being past time for the liberty party, there are only a couple of cooks and stewards in the boat. They wait on the dock for a car, but Stormy is afraid something might happen to queer him at the last minute, so he starts ahead on foot, meaning to flag a car later. He hasn't gone more than two blocks when he meets a messenger boy on a bicyle, and he's got the admiral's dog.

"An overdose of luck," says Stormy to himself, and halts the messenger, leading him around a corner out of sight.

"Look here, son," he says, "I've been sent ashore to get that dog. Let me have him. Here's my pass. You can read what it says."

"Sign for it, then," says the messenger. "Here's a note that goes with him."

And Stormy signs his name and takes the rope they've got tied into Bruce's collar. Then he reads the note.

DEAR ADMIRAL HURLEY:

Your dog appeared at my place this morning, and I am sending him to you by messenger. I hope that his absence has not cost you any anxiety. The report of my visit aboard ship is under construction.

Yours Truly,
RUFUS HOLLINGSWORTH.

Stormy slips the note into his blouse, and pats Bruce on the head. The dog seems mighty glad to see him.

"I could have dodged you," says Stormy,

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"but every shore-patrol that looked at my pass would know the old man had you before time for the dance, and back to the ship I'd go, four bells and a jingle."

The bull-terrier snuggles his blunt nose into Stormy's hand.

"Sure you want to stay ashore," says Stormy, and goes into a drug-store and calls for a taxi.

ON THE way up-town Stormy goes over his plans and they look good to him. He knows it will make a big hit with the admiral if Bruce is brought back to him safe and sound, and he knows that the longer the dog is away the happier the admiral will be to get him back. He can't see a single reason why everything won't work out fine and proper, and the first move is to find a good safe place to park the dog until morning.

"Look here," he says to the hotel clerk. "This dog is a pedigreed pup and he's just been given to the old battle-wagon for a mascot. I want a place to keep him until I get ready to go aboard in the morning."

"Sure," says the clerk, "we couldn't let him stay here as a regular thing, but nobody is going to kick at one night. He can sleep in the bathroom, can't he? And you can ring any time and have one of the boys bring him up a feed."

"Fine guess," says Stormy. "I'll pass the word along that you people have plenty of sense and know how to treat a gob."

Stormy calls up Katie and tells her he will be on hand for the dance like he promised. Then he gets Bruce a big feed, shuts him up in the bathroom and goes for his own supper.

A shore-patrol nabs him while he's eating, and Stormy breaks out his pass and gives the marine the horse laugh.

"Don't take it so hard," Stormy tells him. "Wait until I come bringing in the old man's bull-pup. I'll have you birds coming through with a salute every time you see me."

"Fat chance," says the marine. "That dog's been done away with. And besides, what do you mean killing time in here when you're supposed to be out pup-chasing?"

"Why don't you go on and pinch me, then?" says Stormy. "The admiral would give you a suitable reward for gumming up one of his hunches, especially since one of you leathernecks lost the dog for him in the beginning."

The marine shoves off and Stormy goes on enjoying himself, thinking about Bruce lying sound asleep on the pallet he has found for him in the bathroom at the hotel, and how pleased the admiral is going to be when he brings him back.

"Plenty of liberty for me from now on," decides Stormy, "fight or no fight."

The dance is being pulled off at the big hall over the Elks' Club, and Stormy and Katie get there just about the time things are warming up right for a big evening.

"I was afraid you couldn't get here, after all," says Katie when they step out on the smooth floor to the music of a galloping three-step. "Liberty must be hard to get on the flagship."

"So they say," says Stormy. "We've been going through a test and one of the cooks queered nearly the whole ship."

"So I hear," says Katie, "but of course I don't understand all the Navy customs."

"You leave all that to me," boasts Stormy. "I've got the way cleared for plenty of liberty from now on."

While the musicians take a rest, he leads the way to the refreshment stand.

Stormy couldn't see a single weather sign that looked bad. Katie was a good looker and a real dancer and was turning down a number of whirls she might have had with other fellows.

"Do you think you could get away tomorrow night?" she asks. "I could get up a bunch to go down to the Beach Club, if you think you'd like to go."

"Count on me," says Stormy, dipping into his strawberry sundae. "I'd swim ashore if I had to."

While he's saying it, a marine with a belt on taps him on the shoulder.

"Let me see your pass," says the marine.

It riles Stormy, but he thinks he's all safe, so he acts polite before Katie.

"I wish you'd please excuse me for a minute," he says to her. "I'd like to have a talk with this guy."

Katie smiles at him and goes over to the row of chairs alongside the dance floor. Stormy waves to her and turns to the marine, opening up his pass.

"Read that," he says. "Special permit on the admiral's business. What'd you mean butting in?"

But the marine don't seem impressed. He hands the paper back to Stormy.

"No good," he says. "The admiral's dog has been found. He's out on board now. They flashed in the signal to quit looking. Get on back aboard now."

"It's a frame-up," says Stormy. "I'm staying ashore until morning like the pass reads. If you don't like it, step outside and pull off your belt, and I'll take a crack at you."

"Fresh guy, eh?" says the marine. "I was going to let you go on back to the ship by yourself, but I guess I'll take you in."

"Don't be a boob," says Stormy, hedging a little when his bluff fails to work. "The admiral's dog is no more aboard the ship than I am. I'm watching a fellow here that I think has got him."

"Pretty talk won't get you nothing now,"

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says the marine. "You swelled up your neck too soon. Come on now before I whistle for help and drag you out with the girl looking."

"You birds are the limit," says Stormy, with a meekness that he didn't feel. "Come on with me then, until I get my hat and pea-coat."

He nods at Katie again, and goes into the little anteroom at the side where the men have put their wraps, with the marine right at his heels. The coat-boy is not around, and Stormy begins to dig among the coats as if looking for his own.

"Shake it up," says the marine.

"What do you want me to do?" asks Stormy. "Swipe somebody else's pea-coat? One pinch a night is about all you fellows rate, anyhow."

The marine is not much bigger than Stormy, and Stormy works him around until he's standing in front of a bathroom door, with Stormy holding a pea-coat in each hand.

"One of these is mine," he says. "Take a look through the pockets, won't you? It ought to have a cigaret case with my name on it."

The marine starts to look, and all of a sudden Stormy jams the coat he's holding down over his head, shoves him backward into the bathroom, and locks the door. Stormy has his own coat spotted all the time, and he picks it up, grabs his flat-hat and goes out to where Katie is sitting, careful to shut the cloak-room door behind him. The music has started and drowns out what noise is coming from the bathroom.

"The admiral has just sent for me," he says to Katie. "Got a code message to get off that he's afraid for the others to handle.

"Too bad, little girl, but I guess I'll have to be saying good night. Would you rather I took you home, or do you want to stay a while longer?"

"I'll go now," says Katie. "Wait until I get my things. We'll dance again tomorrow night."

"I'll go hail a bus of some kind," says Stormy, and jumps down the stairs four at a time. By the time he gets a taxicab from the bunch that is waiting for the dance to break up, Katie is ready and they make a clean getaway.

"You seem in an awful hurry," says Katie.

"Didn't mean to be," says Stormy, "but the admiral is a nice old fellow and I like to please him."

All the time he's thinking how lucky he is that the marine is one from the shore station, and that his pass reads "bearer" with no name but the signature.

STORMY gets back to the hotel and into his room about midnight. Knowing where he's left the admiral's dog he figures that the marine's story is all wrong, and that he either was jealous of a gob having such a good time, or else somebody has picked up the wrong pup. He opens the bathroom door for a look, expecting to see Bruce jump out at him, happy and excited at having a romp.

But Stormy gets a surprize. Bruce is gone. Stormy even gets down on the floor and looks under the tub. No dog. All he finds anywhere is a few scratches and some hairs on the window-sill.

Bruce is used to lots of company, and he's not keen for being shut up in a hotel room all alone. Stormy has left the window open so he will have plenty of air, and at the second jump from the edge of the tub he makes it, wriggles out on the wide cornice, and pretty soon he's into another window that opens into the corridor. After that, it's only four flights of stairs to the street.

By the time Stormy is saying good night to Katie, Bruce has had two fights, treed a couple of cats and been chased by a fat marine who would like to have a stand-in with the admiral. Altogether he has had as big a night's liberty as Stormy Jones.

Then he remembers how nice and warm the wood-shed is out at Rufus Hollingsworth's, and strikes out across town. By and by he finds the wood-shed open, the pile of excelsior in the same place, and about the time Stormy comes into the hotel room to pat him on the head and call him a good dog, he's sound asleep about four miles away.

Stormy worries a little while as he undresses, for he has promised Katie that he will be ashore the next day, counting on the extra liberty that finding the dog ought to get him.

"Why didn't I tie him?" thinks Stormy to himself as he climbs into bed.

But he's danced so many times that he goes off to sleep still wondering. Next morning he remembers that he signed the messenger boy's receipt for Bruce, and that he still has Rufus Hollingsworth's note to the admiral.

"I've got to think of something," he says to himself. "Bruce is back, like the marine said, and Rufus is going to be looking for a note of thanks from the old man. When it don't come, he'll find out that a red-headed gob signed for him. I've got to think of something, and I've got to be aboard by two bells."

A stack of hot cakes and a cup of coffee got Stormy along to where he'd thought of saying he'd taken the dog from the messenger boy, and that Bruce had broken away. But somehow he felt as if the cakes had deceived him. He and Bruce were too friendly. There would have to be variations or the yarn wouldn't get by.

"Why didn't I tie him?" repeats Stormy. "He clawed out of that window and went back to the dock. One of the night boats must have picked him up."

Stormy hopes for the best and starts for the dock, giving the jitney driver four-bits to drive

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fast and offering that much more if he escaped being pinched.

Rufus Hollingsworth finishes his report that night and has it all ready to turn in to the society the next day. He had a copy for the newspaper and one for the admiral. Until well past midnight his family heard his typewriter banging away.

It was some broadside, at that, featuring Stormy's fight with the cook until even Stormy would have been horrified with himself, and laying on a few extra trifles about how everybody has tried to deceive him.

When he has his cup of hot water the next morning and reads it over, he feels that he has again justified the trust put in him, and adds that line in pencil.

"That dog is back again, sir," says the cook as she serves Rufus a tablespoonful of bran, and Rufus makes a few well-bred remarks into his napkin, and gets choked, swallowing the rest a good deal faster than is good for him. Then he starts out to the ship. He's going to take Bruce back himself.

WHAM! goes a tire a mile from the docks, in a quiet stretch of road with no houses around, and while Rufus climbs out and crawls under, along comes Stormy.

"Back up," he tells the taxi driver. "There's an old friend I want to help out of trouble. Go on back to town and leave me with him."

Rufus don't seem happy at seeing Stormy, but Bruce greets him like a long-lost brother. Stormy begins to unfold his little tale, caught out of the air for just this streak of luck.

"Good morning, sir," he says, meek as a fellow out of the brig asking for extra grub. "I'm looking for this dog. He belongs to the admiral. Here's a note——"

But Rufus straightens up from where he's pushing on the spare tire, and tells Stormy to keep going.

"I'll attend to it myself," he says. "The dog was started on his way to Admiral Hurley yesterday. He didn't arrive. I mean to see to the affair personally this time."

"It's kinda choppy out in the harbor this morning," Stormy goes on. "I'm going that way anyhow, and it would save——"

"It's no use," says Rufus, glaring at him and shooting in a hot one. "The messenger reports that a red-headed sailor named Jones signed the receipt for the admiral's dog yesterday."

"He got away from me," says Stormy. "I—I've been looking everywhere for him."

But Stormy knows his reputation is already ruined and that what he says isn't cutting any grease with Rufus. Still he hangs around hoping, and willing to bet an unsoiled five-spot against a plugged nickel that he will be back in the brig before night.

"Move on," says Rufus, getting nervous and fumbling at the tire as Stormy stands by to watch.

"I know a good deal about machines," says Stormy, trying to be friendly. "Maybe I can help you if you'd let me."

Rufus grunts at him and pays no attention. Bruce is lying alongside the machine, and Stormy has a wild notion to pick him up and run, but it's a mile to the dock, and he knows Rufus will be on his trail harder than ever if he tries any rough stuff.

With the skipper and the admiral trying to play up for a favorable report, he'd be worse off than if he sat steady and let things come out as they'd started. He stays on, acting pretty, but feeling like he's tied to something with the fuse burning, and with a hunch that Rufus means to make somebody a shining example to the rest of the Navy.

Rufus is screwing on the last nuts when a big runabout drives up, honks a couple of times and stops.

"What do you mean blocking the road?" says the big beefy man at the wheel, and Stormy sees he's mighty well pleased at the chance to give Rufus a call-down.

Rufus bends farther down over his work and makes no answer. But his face gets a lot redder than it ought to be in replacing a tire on a fine cool morning.

"Are you going to move that outfit? Or shall I get down and help you?" says the big man.

And this time Rufus talks back.

"I'm within my rights, Mr. Foley," he says. "There's room enough to drive around."

"I don't want to drive around," says Foley. "I want you to move. It's going to do me good to see you own up to being in the wrong just once."

Stormy is trying to get the argument straight in his mind. It looks to him as if Foley is hunting trouble. He's got a bull-pup about the size and color of Bruce along with him, and the dog hops out of the machine and follows him across the road as he comes up to Rufus.

"You and the other gong-beaters have been having things your own way too long," he says. "Get that junk out of the way. You long-haired, holier-than-thou politicians haven't closed up the highway yet."

Rufus looks at him, trying to figure out what might happen. Foely acts like any kind of an excuse is going to be plenty for a couple of punches to Rufus's jaw.

"Be careful," says Hollingsworth; "there's a witness to your threatening remarks."

"He'd better turn his back," says Foley, "or go blind. One of his tribe swiped my dog last night and took him out to the ship. I'd

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as soon take it out of this one's hide as anybody's."

Foley's bull-pup starts action and makes a running jump at Bruce where Stormy stands holding him by the collar.

"Let him go, Flatfoot," says Foley. "We might as well clean up the bunch of you while we're about it."

Stormy lets go. The two dogs go into a clinch and Foley circles around them, urging his pet to make a meal of the admiral's dog.

Stormy thinks there's a chance to get in some good work on his own account. He has seen Bruce fight enough to know that Foley's dog won't have any easy pickings.

"Go on and get out of it," he says to Rufus. "This guy is figuring on handing you a couple of black eyes as soon as the dog-fight is over. Having his dog licked won't make him any happier, either."

"I won't be chased away by a common gangster," says Rufus. "We were fortunate enough to put this man and his crowd out of power the last election. Naturally he's resentful."

"Well, I've told you," says Stormy. "You'd better be going. You can see how old Bruce is attending to his part. That dog is a fighting fool, if I did help train him."

"It must stop at once; it's disgraceful," says Rufus, and starts to try to drag the dogs apart.

This is just the move that Foley has been hoping for, and he gets one of his big hands in Rufus's collar, and sends him spinning across the road, helping him along with the toe of his shoe. Then he aims a kick at Bruce, but misses, and Rufus picks himself up and makes a charge.

Stormy sees that the kick or something has broken through to where Rufus keeps his temper, and that after all the gong-beater is a human being underneath his armor plate.

Foley is anxious about his dog, and he wants to make a quick wind-up of Rufus. He swings hard, lands fair and knocks his man down the first blow. Then he tries again for the footwork on Bruce, with his own dog yelping like he's got something hot and can't let go.

"That'll do," says Stormy, thinking it's time to butt in. "If you don't like the treatment he's getting, tell me and I'll call my dog off."

"I'll fix the cur," says Foley, and circles to try again, but Rufus is a harder nut than Foley thinks, and beats Stormy to it, coming behind and landing a wild swing. The blow lacks steam, but it makes Foley that much hungrier for revenge.

He quits the dog-fight, knocks Rufus down with a punch to the jaw and is standing over him looking for a soft place to kick him in the ribs when Stormy rings in a stinger behind the ear that he's not counting on. Foley cusses and looks around just in time to collect another one over his left eye, but he flips his head back and misses the next one like a fellow who is used to the gloves.

Stormy knows then that he's let himself in for a real scrap. Rufus gets up, goes over and pulls Bruce off the other dog, and leans up against the side of his machine, watching Stormy and Foley go to it. He knows that when the big fellow finishes up with the sailor he will come after him worse than ever, but he doesn't feel able from the last punch on the jaw he has had, and the other rough handling, to do anything about it.

Foley looks as big as a mountain beside Stormy, and Rufus can't see how the battle is going to last more than a couple of minutes. The way the red-head handles himself reminds him of the way he went after the cook, and it makes him think of the report he has in his pocket.

Stormy is using a whole lot of footwork and working fast, knowing that if he tries any give and take he will lose out quick; also he would rather not carry any busted ribs back aboard ship with his other troubles, and he plays a game of hit and run, using everything he knows about boxing, and being careful, for if Foley would kick Rufus after he was down, he would do the same to him.

"Butt in, will you!" says Foley. "Since when did you figure that light-weights had a chance with all classes? I'll fix you and your cur pup at the same time."

Stormy is saying nothing in words, but he rams home a nasty one to Mr. Foley's thick lips that makes a louder noise than talking. Foley gets wise that he's tackled a hornet and quits laying himself open. It's all plain hard fighting to Stormy. He dodges and side-steps and runs away, but Foley keeps coming.

Taking a jump back to miss punishment, Stormy makes a mistep on part of Rufus's tool-kit, and he gets a straight jab into his his ribs which knocks him over backward. The big fellow doesn't wait for Stormy to get up, but comes running to use his shoes. Stormy wiggles sideways from the first one, and almost gets to his feet, but Foley shoves him down and tries to jump on him where he lay.

IF STORMY has not been very mad until now. A fight is a fight, and he has had a good many. All he wanted in the beginning was to keep the admiral's dog from getting hurt, but jumping on him is too personal. He wriggles again, gets to his feet and goes after Foley.

Foley grunts as he begins to take punishment. Instead of a one-sided sparring match where he waits for one punch to wind the thing up in his favor, the red-headed sailor is coming for him, regardless of the outcome to himself.

But Foley is used to that kind, too. After the first shock he covers up, smothers Stormy

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down, gets his right arm free for a good opening.

"I believe you'd bite, you little fool," he sneers, and at the same time sends across the straight-arm jab to Stormy's jaw that he has been looking for.

As Stormy reels back and Foley steps in for the finish, he stops suddenly, spins around as if he is drunk, and sprawls face-down on the road.

It's Rufus. Dusting off his clothes, getting his breath back a little, he sees Foley try what even he knows is against the rules. It makes him madder and madder, until he picks up the biggest wrench among his kit and uses it on the back of Foley's head where it will do the most good.

"Good work!" gasps Stormy. "I lost my head a little. He 'most had me. He's a bad one, all right!"

"Do you think he's hurt?" asks Rufus, kind of pale and shaky after the mix-up is over.

"Not bad," says Stormy. "He's got a thick skull and plenty of hair. Pour a little water on him out of the radiator, and I'll finish up the tire."

But Rufus pleads that he knows nothing about first aid, and in a minute or two Stormy has Foley sitting up alongside the road and wondering if he has run his machine into a telegraph pole.

"What hit me, sailor?" he says to Stormy, feeling the bruise on the back of his head.

Stormy has a lightning hunch and picks up the big wrench that Rufus has dropped.

"This," he says. "You start something and I'll crack you another one."

He looks over at Rufus and tries to give him a sign to keep still, but things are happening so fast that Rufus does not get the drift right at once, and there's no need for it.

"You didn't have a wrench," says Foley, still groggy.

"I got it off the ground when you knocked me down," Stormy tells him. "Any big guy that tries to jump on me with his feet is going to find that more than one can play rough."

Rufus starts to say something, but turns his back quick and begins to roll up the tool-kit. Stormy waves the big wrench and tells Foley to get into his machine and beat it.

The big man is kind of puzzled and a good deal tamer than he was. His licked pup is sitting on the seat of the machine with one ear pretty badly chewed up. Foley goes on over and climbs up beside him.

"That old psalm-singing hypocrite hit me," he says to Stormy, "and this is not going to be the last he hears of it."

"I know who hit you," says Stormy. "Shove on off before you get another one in the same place."

FOLEY starts his car and heads for town. His head is aching bad and he wants time to figure the thing out.

Rufus puts his gear aboard, cranks up and heads for the ship. Stormy is in the back seat with Bruce. Before long Rufus slows down and motions Stormy to come over into the seat beside him. He's been thinking.

"Eh—Mr. Jones," he begins, "just why did you take the blame for striking this Foley?"

"Fighting's not your business," says Stormy, his line of talk all ready. "This bird might do you a lot of harm if he spread the news around telling it to suit himself."

Rufus draws a long breath, and drives on a little farther.

"I see," he says. "You wished to gain my favor. Lying is a poor way, my boy. I must do my duty, even though it injures me personally."

"You've got me wrong," says Stormy, panicky for fear he's going to lose out by a fluke unless he springs a new one quick. "Let me tell you how it looks to me. I get into this to protect the admiral's dog, since getting him back is my business ashore. This Foley is about to trim me, as well as stave in a couple of ribs for good measure. You help me out when I'm a goner. What I told him was to even up the score."

Rufus thinks about this a little while, and Stormy hands over his pass and lets him read it. Rufus thinks again about the red-hot report he has in his pocket, and what Foley might have done to him if Stormy hadn't taken a hand. He decides that fighting might have its uses.

But the thing that burned into him worse than all was that he, Rufus Hollingsworth, had lost his temper and fought just as savagely and as much outside the rules as Foley had himself. Only Stormy had played the game fair.

THEY roll up to the dock, catch a boat just shoving off and go out to the ship. Stormy does not know how his case stands, but he has Bruce by a short tether, and that means something. Also it is only a few minutes past nine o'clock.

He reports to the officer of the deck, turns the dog over to the marine sentry at the door of the admiral's stateroom and goes on forward. He's played his hand and is waiting for the show-down.

Rufus asks for an audience with the admiral, and since the old man has just finished breakfast he is let in at once.

Hasty Day catches Stormy hanging around the galley for an after-breakfast hand-out. He stops and offers a cigaret.

"I hear you brought the old man's pup back," he says. "One of them durned trimming leathernecks brought another white dog

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out here last night and broke the old man out of bed. But it wasn't Bruce. He wouldn't have a thing to do with the Old Man.

"What's on your mind, Stormy? You don't look as happy as a hero ought to, with liberty restored and everything. Let's you and me go ashore again tonight."

"I'll let you know later," says Stormy, and sidesteps, watching aft to see what is going to happen.

Rufus comes up and stops beside the chest where Stormy is laying in sea-stores against another hitch in the brig.

"I've explained the whole affair satisfactorily to the admiral," says Rufus. "I might say that in some minor details I felt free to gloss over the facts—that is, leave them obscure, so to speak. It is quite possible that in the excitement of a strange city the dog temporarily lost his powers of discrimination, and did run away from you.

"I also told him that it was I who struck Foley with the wrench. He seemed no little elated, so I gathered that he thought the action quite justified. Quite so. But it grieves me that I lost my temper."

"Yes, sir," says Stormy. "It gets us all sometimes."

"I feel sure of that, my boy," says Rufus. Then he shakes hands and catches the next boat back.

TWO days later the captain makes a complaint to the admiral.

"This signalman Jones, sir, is going ashore every night, and some queer stories are coming from town through the marine guard and others. The ship's writer tells me it is a special order. I'm not quite sure, sir, that he is responsible for finding your dog."

The admiral pulls open a drawer of his desk, and takes out two typewritten sheets.

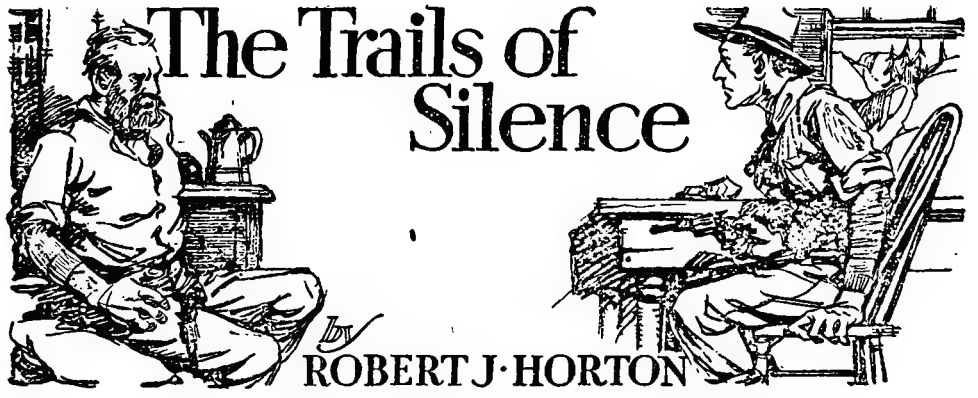
"Just glance over that," he says, and the captain runs his eye down over Rufus Hollingsworth's first report of his visit to the *Mynton*.

"And this," says the admiral, laying the other sheet over the first.

The captain read and looked up.

"Which is the real one?" he asks. "This last is the best boost for the outfit we ever had. Better than we dared hope. But the first is a scorcher."

"The good one is the one that is to be published over Hollingsworth's signature, and has gone to all the societies he represents. The other is a souvenir. Give this boy Jones all the liberty he asks for. I don't care what high jinks he cuts up ashore. This is the effect it had on Hollingsworth, and except for a couple of scratches, Bruce is safe and sound and glad enough to stay aboard."



The Trails of Silence

by ROBERT J. HORTON

Author of "Checkers at Hungry Horse," "Queen of the Hills," etc.

"THE Finlander's been killed!"

Talk in the little mountain store where a scattering and limited population from surrounding territory had gathered to await the arrival of the weekly stage suddenly was stilled.

A youthful figure stood breathless before the men.

"What's that you're a-sayin', son?" demanded the gray-haired postmaster and storekeeper.

"The Finlander's been killed," repeated the boy, who was flushed with excitement. "Murdered, I guess. I was up the gulch fishing and stopped at his cabin. He was down on the floor by the table on his back with dried blood on his forehead—dead!"

Slowly the men gathered the few additional details, badly garbled, which the boy was able to give them. He had been too startled and horrified to notice much, although what he had seen had left an indelible impression upon his mind.

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The entire gathering, numbering possibly a score of prospectors—about the whole population of the abandoned mining-camp of Hughestown—hastened down the rough road three miles to Finlander Gulch and proceeded up the narrow cañon to the cabin of the man for whom the gulch had been named and who had lived there alone for many years.

The boy's statement was found to be true. The Finlander was dead with a bullet-hole in his forehead; had been dead probably since the day before, as an examination of the body showed. On two pegs above the bunk hung his .30-30 rifle with its magazine filled and a cartridge in the chamber. There was no other gun about the premises to support any theory of suicide. The Finlander had been murdered.

Motive?

The postmaster, who was an emergency officer by virtue of his Federal position and the standing which it gave him in that isolated section of the Little Belt Mountains, conducted an investigation which revealed the fact that the dead man's money-belt had not been disturbed. It was still tightly buckled about his waist under his thick woolen shirt. None of the things in the little cabin had been touched. The single window, opening on a clearing that reached from the pine growth behind the cabin to the little stream flowing through the gulch, was open. It was Summer and the air was warm.

A rider carried the news of the tragedy to Kingsville, eleven miles down the Dry Fork, and the nearest mountain town of any size on the forest reserve patrol telephone wire. From Kingsville the word was telephoned to Great Falls, the county seat.

Sheriff Wills sent for Boyer.

CASES of this kind, which required a knowledge of the men and trails of the high hills, always went to Boyer. The dark-skinned, slender, keen-eyed man-hunter of the vast, open spaces had never failed. During his long term of service there had been many sheriffs of Cascade County, representing many twists and turns in the changing angles of northern Montana politics, but he always had been retained as a deputy. He was even loaned occasionally to other counties to aid in achieving the ends of Western justice in some obstinate case that fell within the scope of his peculiar activities. For no man in all that country knew so well the habits, and particularly the failings, of the men who frequented the dim trails in the Big and Little Belts and the silver-crested Rockies in the West.

So Boyer listened quietly to such meager details as the sheriff had received over the wire and went to Kingsville, where he inspected the body and found that a bullet from a .30-30 rifle had done the work. Next he hastened to the scene of the killing in the Finlander's gulch.

Now Boyer invested a great deal of confidence in his first impression; but the proverbial tell-tale clew, however insignificant, which is usually present—especially in a wild country where motives and methods of deeds of violence are so often conspicuous—was missing in this instance.

There seemed to be no legitimate reason for this crime.

Little was known of the Finlander, as he generally had been called. The postmaster said his name was Jassen, or something like that—he couldn't swear to his right name! His mail had consisted of occasional raw-fur price lists from St. Louis houses. He had made his living and a moderate surplus, as the money belt revealed, by trapping and panning out a little gold.

He came to the post-office at Hughestown at rare intervals and went to Kingsville about four times a year for supplies. The general store at Kingsville handled his furs and his gold. He had no friends and had discouraged acquaintances. He was queer, according to those who had casually come into contact with him. He had no known enemies.

However it wasn't anything unusual for a man to be living alone in those hills. A great many prospectors were doing it. Why, there was the hermit on Porphyry Ridge who never came for any mail and who went to Kingsville only twice a year for supplies. No one knew anything about him; he repelled casual visitors; he didn't seem to wish to know——

"Where does he live?" interrupted Boyer when this was being told to him.

"Up on that ridge," said the postmater, pointing to a long, barren ridge high above the gulch.

"He hasn't even been interested enough to come down and see why so many people have been coming and going to this cabin lately, and——"

The postmaster paused suddenly. He turned a startled glance upon Boyer, who was staring fixedly at the ridge. "You don't suppose—but no, that fellow's harmless; he's running some tunnels on a lead prospect up there," the postmaster concluded. "He never comes down this way—always goes to Kingsville by way of Sawmill Creek because it's nearer that way."

Boyer began a systematic round of questions. No one else lived in that gulch. No one lived on the Dry Fork near the mouth of the gulch. No one lived in Hooker Gulch across the Dry Fork. To the best knowledge of the postmaster and others no person had been near the spot of the tragedy for two weeks, except the boy who had found the body; and his presence up there had been easily explained and borne out by the full basket of trout which he had caught in the stream.

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THAT afternoon Boyer tramped up the gulch toward Porphyry Ridge. He noticed with interest that the Finlander's placer activities had ceased at a point below the head of the little stream and wondered why the operations had not been carried to the head, where greater values might be expected.

In a clump of fir-trees on the farther side of the ridge from Finlander Gulch, near a spring, he found the cabin of the hermit. The hermit was at home and answered the knock at his door with an invitation to enter.

Boyer was struck by a singular coincidence as soon as he crossed the threshold.

In every particular—in some ways even to the arrangement of the scanty, home-made pieces of furniture—this cabin was an exact duplicate of the one formerly occupied by the Finlander.

"Did you know the man down the creek on the other side?" asked Boyer, noting the gray beard, ruddy cheeks, bright blue eyes and excellent muscular development of the hermit who sat on the edge of the bunk.

"Seen him two or three times," drawled the hermit. "Sit down?"

Boyer sat down on the chair by the table.

"See him lately?" he inquired casually.

"Not at all," was the ready answer.

"Know he was dead?"

"No—is he?"

"It doesn't seem to surprize you much."

"Wouldn't surprize me nary none to hear that *anybody* was dead in these God-forsaken hills!"

"Why do you stay here?"

"I've got to stay some place."

"What was your idea in killing him?"

The hermit started and turned his wide-eyed gaze up to meet Boyer's cold scrutiny.

"What was that?" he flared.

"A stock question," said Boyer smiling. "I'm a deputy sheriff investigating the murder."

Secretly he was nettled because his attempt to profit by observation in springing the element of surprize had failed. Now he wished to see what effect the disclosure of his identity would have. It had none.

"Did somebody kill him?" asked the hermit, now visibly interested.

"Shot him with a .30-30 rifle," said Boyer, glancing at the gun which hung on two pegs above the bunk.

"That's a .30-30," said the hermit wonderingly, as he followed Boyer's glance.

"I know it," frowned Boyer. "More than half the rifles in these parts are .30-30's."

"You wasn't thinking that maybe *I* did it?" queried the hermit anxiously.

"I'm questioning everybody," snapped Boyer.

"I suppose you know I never go down that gulch?" asked the hermit.

"So I heard—why?"

"I never go over the ridge except to go down to Kingsville to sell my furs and get supplies; and then I go by Sawmill Creek because it ain't so far that way."

"What's your name?" demanded Boyer.

"Frank Mason."

"How long have you been here?"

"Well, I've 'most lost track but it's somewheres around twelve or fifteen years."

"You and Jassen came here together?"

"Who's Jassen?"

Boyer shrugged.

"The dead Finlander," he answered.

"No—I came in from Yogo way because I thought there was lead here; and there *is* lead here—lots of lead, and some copper, too. Just look at these samples I've——"

Boyer waved him back and rose to go.

"Won't you have a cup of tea or a bite to eat?" invited the hermit.

"Can't stop that long; I'll be going out of the hills tonight," replied Boyer. He paused in the doorway. "You say you had seen this Finlander before you came here?"

"No, did I say that?" countered the other, surprized.

"I might have imagined it," said Boyer. "You trap for a living—any gold?"

"Not on this side."

Boyer's eyes lighted instantly.

"Gold on the other side?" he asked quickly.

"So I've heard; but I'm not interested in gold—not enough of it around here. I'm after lead—lead and copper. And there's a lot of it here, too, I'll tell you. I wish you'd take a look at these samples from my claims."

Boyer shook his head and departed.

After another cursory examination at Hughestown he left for Kingsville. At Kingsville, the base of supplies for that district, he pursued his efforts to obtain information which might establish a motive for the crime. He learned nothing except that the dead man had been bringing in more gold each year and that his trapping returns also had shown an increase despite his long continued activity in the vicinity of the gulch.

Nothing could be learned of any relatives of the dead man or of where he had come from or when. With his death his life seemed a sealed book. Nothing could be construed as pointing to an enemy, for there was no indication that the victim ever had had any trouble with any one. Lack of detail automatically cemented a wall about the case which Boyer was unable to penetrate, except by theory.

He had a theory that the hermit on Porphyry Ridge knew more about the dead man, and perhaps more about the case, than he was willing to tell.

But Boyer could not arrest a man in connection with the murder on anything so flimsy as a

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partly formed theory. He knew the characteristics of a Montana grand jury too well to assume that he could secure the indicting of a man because he happened to be living alone near another man, also living alone, who had been shot to death.

Yet the very modes of living of the two men, the Finlander and the hermit, were so similar, their activities were so nearly parallel, and they were seemingly so careful not to trespass upon each other, that his natural suspicions were aroused. And there was that other peculiar coincidence—the similarity in the cabins.

Boyer remained in Kingsville several days but made no progress in the case. He had a talk with the forest-ranger. He wandered about the district, but everywhere he found others as frankly mystified as himself. Moreover he found that none possessed a theory.

It was a country of lonely men.

In every direction the great bare peaks reared above the green timberlands; and in scores of mountain meadows, valleys, gulches, and on the pine-clad slopes, were the cabins of prospectors who continually scratched the hillsides and dug in the stream-beds in their everlasting search.

Boyer returned to Great Falls apparently baffled.

SHERIFF WILLS was astonished when he received the man-hunter's report. His respect for the mysterious aspects of the case increased a hundred fold when he learned that Boyer had made no headway in tracking down the murderer.

"But I haven't given up," said Boyer quietly. "An affair like this was probably a long time coming to a head; it may be a long time unraveling."

"Well, it's up to you," said his chief, who knew it would be useless to put another man on a trail which Boyer had lost. "Meanwhile we're having some trouble with that bad-lands bunch down the Missouri again—more cattle gone, sheep-herder killed. You better take a run down there."

Boyer went. Two weeks later he camped for a night with a sheep-herder near Nine-mile spring.

The yellow prairies were ghostly gray under an August moon. The sheep-herder was singing to his flock as he drove them slowly up a little slope from the spring to the bedding place on the benchland. A light breeze, blowing gently from the mountains, sang in the coulées. Boyer felt the lure of loneliness, the freedom from worldly cares, even from time itself. Did these lonely men keep any track of time?

"Garden, can you remember when it was they had that jubilee celebration in Fort Benton last year?" he asked the sheep-herder when supper was started.

"September third, fourth, and fifth," said the sheep-herder. "Poor time for me, too; I couldn't get off."

"That so. I thought it was in October," observed Boyer.

"First week in September," insisted the other. "Here, I'll show you."

"Oh never mind," said Boyer. And then curiously, "How you going to prove it?"

For answer the sheep-herder disappeared within his wagon and returned with a little book.

"Here it is in my diary—third, fourth, and fifth, just as I said. See the entries?"

He held the diary for Boyer to see. Boyer took the book.

"You put everything down in this?" he asked, still curious.

"Everything. You turn to August—but no, that's last year's book. But in this year's book I've got everything that happened when the bad-lands bunch raided the ranch at Flowerce—everything I told you. Them books and the dogs is the only friends I've got. I tell 'em both everything."

Boyer was casually looking over the entries.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "On this day last year you was right here at this same spring!"

"Sure. I've kept this route pretty well for the last three years; and this is the only spring that's got plenty of water in August. The range is getting shut off pretty bad since the fool homesteaders got in hereabouts."

Boyer glanced at a few more entries and returned the book.

After supper they made their bed on the bunch-grass. Far in the southwest the dim black outlines of the Little Belts showed against the canopy of stars. All through the lowlands, and in the high hills beyond, were men isolated from their fellows by choice—because they could not withstand the lure of the freedom of the silences.

It truly was a country of lonely men, Boyer reflected; and out of the vast space of distance came an idea. It was this faculty of being of the texture of the men he hunted that made Boyer invaluable.

THREE months after this, in November, the Finlander murder mystery still was a mystery. To all appearances not so much as a hint of a clew had been obtained by the authorities. The mountain-folk had almost ceased commenting on the matter. Time and inactivity always compromise a mystery in the high hills where every isolated section of the mountains has its own secrets, whispered to the winds alone. Many had forgotten.

But Boyer was not among this number.

He ascertained by telephone when Dave Williamson, proprietor of the general store at Kingsville, was going to Great Falls on his next trip and met him in town.

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"Has that fellow Mason up on Porphyry Ridge put in his Winter supplies yet?" he asked Williamson.

"No; but I expect him any day," answered the merchant.

"All right. I want you to do a favor for me, if you will," said Boyer as the other nodded willingly. "I want you to give this little package to that hermit and tell him it's a New Year souvenir from your store. Do not tell any one of this, and whatever you do, Williamson, do not connect *my* name with this thing. Will you do this for me?"

"I sure will," said the merchant in a hearty voice. "And mum's the good word. You can trust me."

"You better wrap it up in some paper from your own store," cautioned Boyer, "or take the wrapping off entirely. But see that he gets it, and as a gift from you."

Within a week Williamson telephoned that the hermit had come down for his Winter supplies and had taken the souvenir back with him. The merchant had presented it with his compliments, he said. He told Boyer that the hermit had brought in a little gold for the first time in years. He had told no one of the gift. Snow had been light in the mountains that Fall, and there was as yet little or no ice.

For nine months Boyer made no reference to the Finlander case. He took the jokes of his associates to the effect that he had been bested at last good-naturedly. But when Sheriff Wills mentioned the matter once during the Winter, and again in the Spring, Boyer stated simply that it was a long trail and he was still on the case.

MIDSUMMER came round again; and once more the prairies were like sheets of gold under the sun as Boyer turned his horse toward the purple peaks of the Little Belts.

Three days he was on the trail up Belt Creek until he came to a point several miles below Kingsville. Here he swung up from the valley to the high range in the triangle between Belt Creek, the Dry Fork and the Basin. He followed the range until he reached a timbered slope above Porphyry Ridge. From this place of vantage he could see the cabin of Frank Mason, the hermit.

In the twilight he trained his binoculars upon the long ridge below and saw the hermit coming up from Finlander Gulch.

That night he remained in the timber, hobbling his horse and eating sandwiches which he had brought in his saddle-bag.

Next morning he took up his vigil and watched until he saw the hermit cross the ridge and make his way down the gulch on the other side. Then he quickly made his way down the draw to the ridge. He tied his horse in the green timber where it was screened from view. He approached the hermit's cabin.

The door was locked by means of staples and padlock. He forced the window. For more than two hours Boyer remained inside, and when he emerged he removed all evidence of his means of entry. He mounted and rode down the slope of the ridge on the farther side from the gulch until he was two miles below the place where Finlander creek emptied into the Dry Fork. Here he crossed the ridge, made his way down the other side and urged his horse up the Dry Fork road to the mouth of the gulch.

As he rode up the gulch itself he whistled and sang and otherwise made as much noise as possible. It was his intention, apparently, to give ample warning of his approach.

He found no one at the cabin where the Finlander had been murdered. But farther up the creek he observed indications that the placer operations started by the Finlander were being worked again. He passed the head of the stream and climbed the ridge without seeing a living soul.

The door of the hermit's cabin was open.

"Anybody home?" Boyer sang out, dismounting.

The hermit appeared in the doorway.

"Come in," he drawled.

Boyer noticed that while the man looked and acted the same as he had the last time he had seen him, a year before, his mode of dress had changed somewhat. He wore heavier boots; boots, for example, of the kind which a man much in the water might wear; and they were streaked with soft, yellow mud. Low down on his right side hung a leather holster from which protruded the black grip of a six-gun.

Boyer, too, was armed; and as he entered he took the chair by the table without waiting for an invitation to be seated.

"Remember me?" queried Boyer easily.

"Seems to me I've seen you somewhere," replied the hermit, dropping down on the edge of his bunk.

"I visited you a year ago yesterday," said Boyer. "Remember? About the time of the Finlander murder."

The hermit nodded silently.

"I'm still working on that case."

The hermit raised his eyes inquiringly.

"Making any progress?" he drawled.

"Well, I've picked up a few of the details," smiled Boyer, shifting his right leg over his left and dropping his hands to his lap.

"Know who did it?" asked the hermit.

"Well, whoever did it planned it out some time ahead," said Boyer slowly. "He was down in the gulch on several occasions within a week of the time he killed Jassen, or whatever his name was. I don't suppose Jassen knew he was there."

"Was he—a—enemy of the Finlander's?"

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"Looks like he was; although I'm not sure that Jassen knew that, either. That is, I don't know that he believed he was enough of an enemy to kill him—Jassen, I mean."

The hermit was silent. Boyer leaned forward a bit.

"On the night before the killing," he said earnestly, "the murderer crept down to the edge of the clearing and watched the Finlander for some time. He noticed then that the Finlander had removed the glass in the window of his cabin."

The man-hunter paused and inclined his head to give the emphasis of confidence to his speech.

"The next afternoon," he continued, "the murderer went to the edge of the clearing again. He went in the afternoon because he knew that the few men in these hills up here would be at work then and not listening for any such thing as a shot."

Boyer glanced casually about the cabin's interior, but the hermit's eyes never wavered

"And then--" he suggested.

"He shot him," snapped Boyer. "Funny that he should happen to find the Finlander in his cabin instead of up on his placers. I've thought that maybe Jassen had to go back there for powder or something. You been down that way lately?"

"Not for the last day or two."

Boyer glanced quickly at the other's boots streaked with yellow mud.

"Panning out a little gold?" he inquired.

The hermit's glance was steel-blue.

"I been taking a little out down there; thought I might as well have it as anybody else."

"Thought you was interested in lead."

"I need money to tunnel in hard rock——"

The hermit halted in the middle of his sentence.

"I see—I see," said Boyer. "You need cash for powder and drills. Mason, what did you and the Finlander split up over about fifteen years ago?" The question came like a bullet.

The hermit drew in his breath with a jerk. The fingers of his right hand trembled above the pistol grip at his side.

"I'll tell you why I'm asking you," said Boyer. "I saw that this cabin was a duplicate of the Finlander's cabin the day I was up here a year ago. The same man built both of them. *He* didn't build this one or he would have come up here to live in it. You built them both. You built that cabin down in the gulch there when you and he first came here together—partners. You quarreled and drew lots, or something, to see which would leave, and you lost. You moved up here. You drew a dividing line which neither could cross. You've always been jealous of the Finlander down there because he had the placer deposits and a better territory for furs. There was no gold on your side of the line. You wanted the gold to push your lead prospects—and you wanted revenge. And you thought you was getting it when——"

"Yes?" sneered the hermit. "I thought I was getting it when—what?"

"When you shot him!" cried Boyer.

The hermit's move, lightning fast as it was, proved too slow to suit his purpose, for Boyer shot the gun out of his hand.

"You'll have to come with me, Mason," said Boyer quietly.

The hermit laughed.

"All right," he said; "but I expect you've got to prove all this—eh?"

"Exactly—only *you* will prove it for me," replied Boyer.

"You mean I'm going to make a confession to something I didn't do?"

"I mean you're going to confess to the killing of Jassen, which you did do. That's the only way you can avoid the death penalty, Mason. Think it over. We'll go on down to Kingsville to-night."

NEXT day Boyer arrived in Great Falls with his prisoner.

Frank Mason was formally charged with the murder of the man Jassen. He refused to make any statement. Even the county attorney was skeptical of the story that Boyer told him, although Sheriff Wills seemed satisfied.

"But look here," said the county attorney, "you've established a motive all right but how are you going to prove that this hermit fellow did the shooting? Where's your evidence?"

"I'm banking on him to confess," said Boyer simply.

"Fat chance," jeered the official. "He hasn't admitted anything yet. He still maintains that he never knew that Finlander before he came into that country."

"Listen!" snapped Boyer harshly. "I've got something here that he knows nothing about. Last Fall when I was running down that badlands bunch on the Missouri I stopped one night at Nine-mile spring with a sheep-herder. We had a dispute about a date. The sheep-herder got out his diary and proved he was right. He showed me something else. When men are alone they *have* to have an outlet. That's why they talk to their dogs or to themselves or to an imaginary person. Sometimes they not only talk but they write. And in the security of their isolation and their loneliness they both say and write things which they never expect any one to hear or read.

"Haven't I talked a blue streak to myself and explained everything to my horse in these years I've been riding in this desolate country?"

The country attorney shrugged. It was beyond him. The sheriff, range-born and bred, nodded understandingly.

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"Last November," Boyer continued, "I got Dave Williamson, storekeeper up at Kingsville, to give this man Mason a diary as a souvenir from the store. I felt that the lure of the little book, with its spaces for each day, would get to the hermit. It did. Here's the book. Every space for every day this year up to the day I arrested him is written in. Here's what he wrote on August seventh—one year after the day before the murder:

> Did not go to the gulch to-day until sundown. Couldn't help myself. All day it seemed like somebody was calling in the wind. I went down to the edge of the clearing and looked in at the window but it was all foolishness. A man's a fool to stay up in these mountains alone.

"Now," cried Boyer; "without realizing it the man was retracing his steps of the year before. Here's what he wrote next day, a year to the day after the murder:

> Was awake most of the night. I went out and cut off a branch that's been rapping against the back of the cabin. Went down to the edge of the clearing this afternoon. Nothing. Of course not. I'm going to get out of here with this Summer's clean-up but I won't go out the way we come. I'm going a long, long ways where I can't remember. In two months, maybe three, I'm going.

"I found the diary cached under the floor where he kept his gold," said Boyer. "I claim a man will write things when he's alone that he wouldn't write any other time. What did he expect when he went down to that clearing a year after the day of the murder? What was he figuring on going a long ways off to forget? Why does he say he ain't going out the way *we* came? This book is full of those hints!"

The county attorney now was thoughtful. He inspected at random various pages of the diary with the lead-pencil inscriptions.

"Did you tell him you had this?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Boyer.

"I don't believe he knows what he *did* write in here," mused the attorney. "All alone, feeling a sense of false security; why!" He straightened suddenly. "Come with me," he ordered, reaching for his hat.

"Mason," said the county attorney, peering through the bars of the hermit's cell-door, "do you see this?"

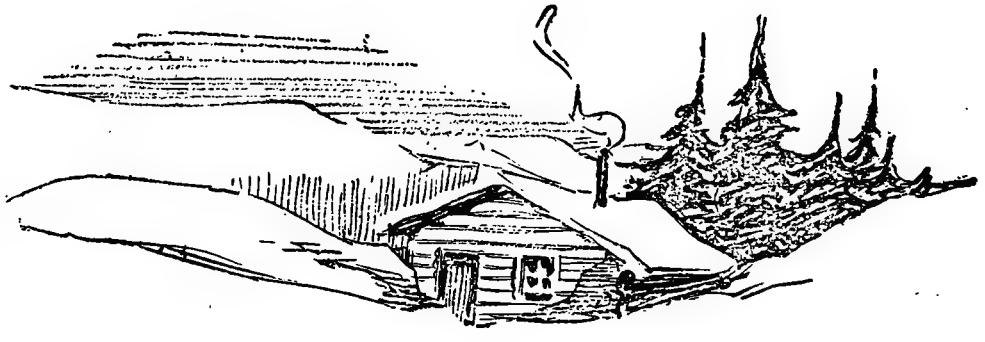
He held the diary in front of the other's eyes. The hermit made a futile grab for the book.

"Have you got any idea what you wrote in here?" demanded the county attorney in a stern voice. "You've traced every move you made on the days leading up to the day of the murder and on that day, one year later, you wrote down how you did it—when you were planning to go away. Remember? Listen, you wrote——"

"Wait!" screamed the hermit. "That fellow there," pointing to Boyer, "what did you say about the death—the death penalty if I—if I——"

"You can still beat it if you confess," said Boyer quietly.

"I'll confess!" shrilled the hermit wildly. "I'll confess!"



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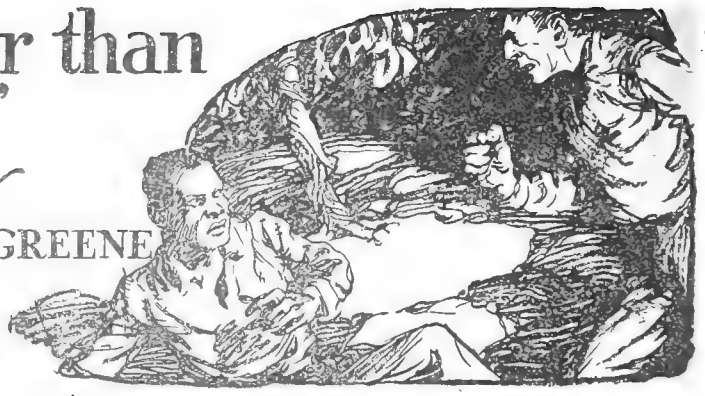
"Thicker than Water"

by L. PATRICK GREENE



Author of "The Death of Zari," "No Evidence," etc.

THE Camp-fire gleamed fitfully through the thick, tropical darkness, throwing into bold relief the faces of the three men who sat around it. In a civilized country they would have been arrested on suspicion by any officer of the law of ordinary intelligence, so villainous was their appearance. Even in the outlands of Africa the arrival of the three caused the settlers in the vicinity to look closely to their property and the safety of their women-folk. Even the natives had nothing but contemptuous hate for them.

They called themselves prospectors and to any unduly inquisitive trooper of the British South Africa Police they would show prospector's licenses, stamped and sealed in good order.

And in a sense they were prospectors—none searched more eagerly for the precious yellow metal than they—but their prospects were gullible miners who had made a rich strike, and whom they sought to inveigle into games of "skill;" failing that, they did not jib at robbery.

" 'And you're sure 'Ardy 'as struck it rich, Soapy?" questioned one. He went by the name of "Squint," having lost the sight of one eye in a drunken brawl.

Soapy snatched the whisky bottle from the third man—a silent, morose creature—drank deeply, coughed and spat into the fire.

" ——, yes."

His voice showed signs of breeding and far belied his appearance.

"Of course I'm sure. Haven't we pumped the few niggers he's got working for him? Haven't we panned some of his ore, and didn't it pan out better than anything we have ever seen or heard of?"

Soapy's voice rose with suppressed excitement.

"And what's more, he's struck a rich pocket—nuggets as big as your fist. I saw them myself."

"Yah!" grunted Squint. "You saw 'em, you —— fool, and 'e knows you saw 'em. 'E'll be on 'is guard now."

"What if he is? What can he do? I tell you the stuff is ours for the asking."

Again he drank deeply and passed the bottle to his companions. For a while there was silence save for the gurgle-gurgle of the fiery liquid emptying into thirsty throats. Near by a hyena howled once.

The three men shivered and drew closer together around the fire.

"Well, wot's the plan, Soapy? Are we goin' to 'elp 'im work it fer part shares? Hit's a bloomin' sure thing 'e can't get no 'elp out 'ere."

Soapy scowled.

"No. I tried that and he swore he'd shoot me if he ever caught me within a hundred yards of his claim."

"Wot then? 'Old the girl fer ransom?"

"Is it likely? How far do you think we could get with that comic-opera stuff? Hold the girl for ransom!"

Soapy snorted his disgust.

"This calls for a strong hand. There's a big haul if we work it right. Listen now. We've got to get hold of the claim and have it registered in our name—legally."

"Sounds easy," scoffed Squint.

"It is," retorted Soapy, disregarding the other's sarcasm. "Here's the plan. Hardy's got no house-boy and he wants one bad. Well, he's never seen Coffee here, and doesn't know he's with us. All right then. Coffee will go up and get the job as house-boy. He'll get the job all right and the rest will be up to him."

He glanced sharply across to where the man he referred to was sitting.

"Are you listening, Coffee?"

Coffee looked up slowly.

"Yes. I'm listening all right."

It was queer how he clipped his vowels and the nasal twang of his voice.

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"What do I do?" he asked.

Soapy laughed shortly.

"What you do is simple. You just have to croak the old man."

"What do you mean?"

"Kill 'im," explained Squint with a grin.

"But, man, what good would that be? There'd still be the girl and—" He stopped short.

"H'i h'always knew you 'ad a yeller streak," sneered Squint.

"Oh, shut up," said Soapy. "You know Coffee's not a quitter. He's using his brain—pity you can't do the same. He's thinking that killing a man is messy and that some one always happens along to ask inconvenient questions. But there'll be no mess the way I plan it, and no occasion for awkward questions.

"It'll be done slowly. You know all about poisonous herbs, don't you, Coffee? Sure you do. What your mother didn't teach you, you picked up at the Mission School.

"Didn't you get a prize for botany there?" It was one of Coffee's most treasured possessions. "Of course. You've got brains and can use them. You're not like Squint here.

"Well, you get some of the stuff that kills slowly, and feed it to the old duffer so that he'll pass away calmly and peacefully and no questions asked."

"But how about the girl?" put in Squint.

"That comes later."

"Yus, but Hi want ter know all abart it now."

"As soon as the old man shuffles off we appear and you, Squint, propose to her."

"Propose? Propose wot?"

"Marriage, you fool."

"Wot? Me marry 'er! Wot the bleedin' —— for?"

Soapy replied slowly but with emphasis as if he were explaining to a little child.

"When the old man dies won't the property revert to her as next of kin? And when she marries won't all her property become her husband's? And that's all there is to it. The old man dies; you marry the girl, and the claim's ours and everything is above-board and legal."

"Sounds easy," assented Squint. "But supposin' the girl balks."

"There are ways and means of bringing a girl to her senses," said Soapy impatiently. "We might give her to Coffee here. I guess she'd do anything rather than have that happen."

Coffee looked up with a scowl, but Soapy passed him the bottle and whatever angry words he was about to utter were lost in his desire for drink.

"That's all right then," said Squint. "But 'ere's another point. Supposin' the girl does agree to 'itch up with me, do yer think she'll stick to hit wen we get before a minister? Not she. She'll blab out the whole tale and then we'll be in a —— of a 'ole."

"And what do you think old Crawford would do if she did tell him?"

Squint slapped his thighs and roared with delight.

"Blyme, but you're a bloomin' wonder, Soapy. You've thought hit all out. We can't fail. Crawford 'ud sell 'is soul—if 'e 'ad one left—fer a bottle of wisky, an' they say 'once a priest alus a priest.' "

"Then it's all agreed?"

"You've said it."

"How about you, Coffee?"

"I'm not sure. I don't like this killing."

"But I tell you there's no risk. Who is there to suspect? The old man has no friends hereabouts. For the girl—she's only just out from England—she's green."

"I tell you I don't like it," demurred Coffee.

Squint looked at him with disgust.

"That's what you get of tying up with a blinkin' 'alf-caste."

He would have said more, but was stopped by a warning look from Soapy.

"Think, Coffee," said the arch plotter. "It means riches for us all. Europe and Paris for me, London and the 'alls for Squint 'ere. And for you—America.

"Think of it, Coffee—America! There you'll be as good as a white man—better than some. White men'll black your shoes and call you mister. No one there will tell you to get off the sidewalk or order you about like a dog. Think of it, Coffee."

Coffee's eyes glistened.

"And you'll promise to help me get over there?"

"On my solemn oath."

"Then I'll do it."

"IVORY" HARDY carelessly fingered the nuggets on the table before him.

"There's enough here, girlie," he said, "to take us back to England and keep us in comfort for the rest of our days. What do you say? Shall we sell the claim and clear out for home and civilization?"

But there was no enthusiasm in his tone. The girl knew that the veld had been his home for many years and that he would not be happy or live long away from it.

Not long out from England to join Hardy—her only living relative—she was already caught in the toils of the veld's fascination. The new experiences, the freedom, had won her completely, and she had no desire to leave it.

Moreover there was a trooper of the B. S. A. P., whose trail had crossed theirs several times, in whose eyes she was very desirable and —well, he was so different from the men she

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had known in England. So much of a man—a man's man.

"Oh, I don't want to go back to England, Uncle Bill," she said. "And you know you said only yesterday that you couldn't get half what the claim was worth if you sold it. Let's stay and prospect a while longer."

Ivory, who was as well able to read between the lines as his niece, pinched her cheek and said with a chuckle:

"All right then, we stay. The claim would lose all its value to a certain party I know if you left it."

Grace flushed and was silent for a moment.

"Uncle Bill," she said suddenly, "I wish you'd hide those nuggets somewhere. That man you kicked off the claim may still be around."

Ivory laughed.

"Well, if he ever summons up courage to rob me it will save a lot of unpleasantness—and perhaps bloodshed—if the stuff's not too carefully hidden. Out here you might just as well kill a man as rob him; yes and stand a better chance of getting away."

At this moment there came a knock at the door. With a sweep of his hairy arm Ivory scooped the glittering nuggets into the drawer of the table.

"Come in," he shouted.

There was no response, and he repeated his command in the native dialect.

"*Figa Iapa.*"

The door opened slowly and the head of Coffee appeared in the opening.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Ivory.

"Boy down-river, he tell me you want house-boy. I being good house-boy."

He waited patiently, showing no trace of his mission-acquired poise and education.

Grace laughed.

"He being a good house-boy, uncle, is the final reason why we stay here. Do you by any chance," she said addressing Coffee, "make bread with washing-soda?"

"Me good house-boy. Know how to cook, wash clothes—know everything."

"He's a perfect paragon, uncle. What's your name?"

"Sixpence, missy."

"Well, consider yourself engaged, Sixpence."

"Not so fast, girlie," interposed Ivory. "Here, boy, where's your pass?"

Coffee fumbled in the pocket of his tattered trousers and produced a thick wad of greasy papers. One of these after careful scrutiny he gave to Ivory.

"Um!" said the latter. "Judging from this you appear if anything to have underestimated your ability. Your past employers give you an excellent record."

Soapy and Squint between them had seen to it that Coffee's working-certificate was in good order.

"Yes. Me good boy," assented Coffee.

"Well, we shall see," said Ivory as he affixed his signature to the certificate as the present employer of one Sixpence—a half-caste of the Matopos District.

COFFEE had not exaggerated when he called himself a good house-boy, and as the days went by Grace left more and more of the running of the kitchen and the camp in general in his hands.

His knowledge—a heritage from his mother's people—of the succulent, tasty herbs, of the edible though ugly fish which swarmed the river, brought a variety to the table that was wonderfully appreciated by Ivory and his niece. They had lived so long on canned food, and always the same canned food—bully beef!

And Coffee? For the first time in his dwarfed, narrow life he had come in actual contact with white people who were just in their treatment of him; who understood and sympathized with him. Instead of kicks and abuse he got appreciation and kind words. Yet he never lost sight of the thing he had come to do.

"Grace," said Ivory after a week had passed, "this fellow Sixpence seems to be all right, but somehow I don't altogether trust him. He's a half-caste—poor devil—and half-castes seem to have the bad traits of both races and none of the good ones."

"Why, Uncle Bill," Grace exclaimed indignantly, "I think you're unfair. Sixpence is wonderful. He's always courteous, and is constantly thinking up things to do that will make the camp more comfortable. And—" she hesitated—"he likes us, I'm sure, and somehow I feel—sorry for him. His is such a hard road."

"Well, he may be all you say, girlie, but watch him closely. I don't want to judge him unfairly, but it has just come to my mind that a half-caste answering Sixpence's description is a running-mate to that blackguard Soapy I kicked off the claim the other day."

"Oh, uncle, I am sure you are wrong."

"I hope I am. But my boss boy tells me that Soapy and another waster called Squint are still camping hereabouts. There was a time when I could have handled such scum myself, but now—" He shook his head. "When does that trooper friend of yours patrol this way again?"

"You mean Dick? He won't be here for another month or more."

"Well, cheer up, girlie. Perhaps you're right about Sixpence an' I'm wrong."

It was at this point that Coffee tiptoed slowly away from the door where he had been listening, and when Ivory emerged to go down to the claim he was busily at work in the kitchen, singing a hymn as he worked with great gusto.

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Ivory paused for a moment and scowled in the direction of the singer.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "He talks broken English, but he sings it correctly. He's not all that he claims to be, that's certain. If it's the nuggets he is after why doesn't he take 'em and clear out? I can well afford to lose 'em. But ——" And, still musing, Ivory passed on his way to the claim.

THAT night Coffee made a stealthy journey to where his fellow conspirators were encamped.

They greeted him boisterously.

"Good for you, Coffee," said Soapy. "You are working it A.1."

"Hi knew as you could do hit," chortled Squint, "hand they don't suspect you a bit. Bless their bloomin' little 'earts."

"But I am not so sure," said Coffee.

And he repeated the conversation he had overheard.

"——!" exclaimed Squint. "If the old man suspects anything we'd better beat hit."

"You always were a chicken-livered blighter," sneered Soapy. "Suppose the old man is a little suspicious; the girl isn't. You have made a hit with her, haven't you Coffee?" he leered. "You'll be cutting Squint out if we don't watch out."

"Hi don't see anything to be so funny about. Hi say let's beat hit."

"And lose the chance of a lifetime? Not me. As long as the girl doesn't suspect, what's the odds? All we got to do is get the old man out of the way before he gets more than suspicious. When he's dead we don't care what the girl thinks."

"But—sye, as 'ow we are up against hit. If 'Ardy suspects 'e'll watch 'is food and our chance is gone."

"But he doesn't know anything definite; suspecting isn't knowing. What do you say, Coffee?"

"I think like Squint. There's danger and I don't like it. Why kill the old man? Let's be content with the nuggets. I know where he keeps them and can get them to you and you can be far away before he knows they are gone. He won't think of suspecting me then, and later I can join you."

"That sounds sense to me, Soapy. Let's do hit."

Soapy's answer was a stream of blasphemy that made even Squint's case-hardened soul shrink within him.

"That's all very well," he expostulated when Soapy's tirade ended, "but wot does 'hit get us?"

"Coffee—" Soapy's voice now sank to a hoarse whisper—"does that stuff you're giving the old man leave any trace? How does it work?"

"It leaves no trace. It slows down the heart until finally it stops."

"How long before the old duffer will die if you continue the doses you are using now?"

"I don't know— A week; perhaps more, perhaps less. He's an old man, but tough."

"Well, what's to hinder you giving him one big dose of the stuff and kill him right away? You could do that?"

"Y-e-s, I can do that, but then the girl would suspect."

"An' wot 'hif she does?"

Squint was now all enthusiasm again for Soapy's plan.

"With the old man hout of the way, I'll tend to the girl. She's my meat."

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"I don't like the idea of killing the old man."

"Gettin' tender-'earted, are yer? Well, let me tell yer that that don't go. You'll go through with this or——"

Squint drew his hand suggestively across his throat.

"A dead yeller-belly, more or less, like you, won't disturb anybody."

"Oh, dry up, Squint, Coffee will see it through. Isn't this his great chance of cashing in enough to take him to America? Do you think he'll pass up on that? Not to mention the fact that he would be throwing over the only white men he's ever met that have treated him just as they would a white man. Of course he'll go through with it.

"Coffee is not the sort to go back on his friends. Now let's all have a drink—talking's dry work—then we'll go over the plan again to make sure there is no weak spot."

When Coffee left them late that night his steps were unsteady and his head whirled, but within him was the determination to carry out Soapy's plan.

"COFFEE, sar?"

"Um—" growled Ivory. "Hope it's better than that vile stuff you called coffee yesterday morning."

He raised the cup to his lips, then, conscious that Coffee was watching him intently put it down again.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Nothing, sar. I wait to see if it is all right. If not I throw away and make more."

But Ivory was not satisfied and would have questioned further had not Grace entered at that moment.

"Good morning, Uncle Bill," she said merrily. "My but what an old bear you are getting; always grumbling at your food. I'll drink your coffee this morning; then I'll know for sure whether it's just your imagination or——"

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She reached for the cup, but Coffee, realizing that if she drank it it would mean the undoing of Soapy's plan, stumbled against her and knocked the cup out of her hand.

"Why, you ——" roared Ivory. "What's the matter with you? Are you drunk?"

"Oh, hush, uncle. Don't you see he's ill? He must have fever; why, he's shivering like a leaf."

"Yes, missy," said Coffee, "I sick."

"Go to my hut and you'll find on the table there a bottle of pills—medicine; you understand? Take five of them and then go to bed. I'll do the rest of the cooking today."

As Coffee dragged himself slowly out of the door Grace turned to her uncle.

"You see! He really is sick, Uncle Bill."

"Maybe, maybe. But it is the first time I've know quinine to be given for the morning-after feeling. I wonder where he got it."

"Uncle!" said Grace reproachfully.

"Well, I may be wrong. However, you had better go to your hut and watch that he doesn't steal anything."

"Indeed and I'll do no such thing. I'm going down to the claim."

"All right, girlie," assented Ivory. "I'll watch him myself."

WHEN Coffee left the mess-hut he went directly to the one which served as Grace's bedroom; not because he needed the medicine she had told him to take but to bear out the impression he had created that it was sickness that had caused him to knock the cup out of Grace's hand.

He opened the door slowly, hesitated for a moment on the threshold, then entered and shut the door behind him.

It was the first time he had ever entered Grace's hut and somehow he was affected by the air of sweetness that pervaded it. Grace had managed to put a great deal of her personality into the decorations, rude though the furnishings were.

Idly Coffee allowed his eyes to rove around the walls until finally his attention was held by the photograph of a man which held the place of honor over Grace's bed.

He snatched it down from the wall and, sitting down on the bed, looked at it intently.

Finally he took from his pocket a small locket, opened it and compared the photo it contained with the photo he had taken from the wall.

It was at this moment that Ivory, true to his word, entered to see what Coffee was doing.

"Well," he roared, "what do you mean by sitting down here?"

Coffee looked up dully.

"I was just going, sir"—no trace now of the broken English he had formerly used when speaking to his employer.

He rose to his feet.

"No, you stay here a minute. I want to have a few words with you."

Then, catching sight of the photo in Coffee's hand—

"And what were you going to do with that—steal it?"

Coffee handed him the picture.

"Who is it, sir?"

Ivory looked at him curiously.

"That was missy's father. Why?"

Coffee thrust the locket into Ivory's hand.

"And who is that?"

"Why, that's missy's father too. Where did you get it?"

"My mother gave it to me. She told me that it was a picture of my father."

A note of exultation crept into Coffee's voice.

"And she is my sister!" he cried.

Ivory raised his hand threateningly. The idea of a half-caste claiming blood-relationship with his beloved niece was altogether too much for him to stomach. Then he sensed the tragedy in the other's life and his hand dropped to his side.

But his next thought was of Grace and the effect the knowledge of Coffee's kinship would have on her.

"You must go away—at once. Missy must never know what a waster her father became after he came out to this country. She must never know that she has a half-caste brother. Why, the shame of it 'ud kill her."

Suddenly it dawned on Ivory that he was pleading with Coffee and with the realization came a change in his manner.

"But what can a thing like you understand about the feelings of a white girl? You'll understand this though, —— you. If you whisper a word of this to her, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life. Why ——"

"*Tula*— hold thy speech," said Coffee, reverting in the stress of the moment to the tongue of his mother's people. "Ye white men have knowledge of many things concerning which we others are as ignorant as little children. But the things pertaining to the heart we know, we black ones, and fully understand. And as for me, aye, ye do well to call me a 'thing' without a name, for that I am and have always been.

"Think ye. I have always been a thing of reproach and scorn among my mother's people. Less than the dogs that whine for the bones to be thrown them, they treated me; yet all this while I held myself as better than they, for the blood of a white man flowed in my veins. Fool that I was. Better for me had my father been one of the 'little people,'—the bushmen."

"Then:

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"Now look well upon me; is it not a true thing that I favor the people of my father rather than of the woman who bore me? I sought to win the favor of the white men. To the mission school I went and acquired not a little of the white man's knowledge. Yet was my lot harder than beforetimes. No man trusted me and every hand was turned against me. I was a dog that had no master."

"You poor devil," said Ivory slowly. "But the evil that was done can not be mended. Yet if I could help——"

"Nay, it is a matter beyond thy help. Yet listen, for I can help thee. Heed well. I came hither and sought service with thee that I might poison thee."

"But to what end?"

"When thou wast dead two white men, Squint and Soapy, would have come, and the girl, missy, would have been forced to marry one of them so that they could take thy claim for their own ends, and I—I would have been rich also and intended to leave this place of my shame, to go to a better land—even to America."

"But you can't do it now; you've put me on my guard."

"No, I can't do it now," said Coffee wearily. He now spoke in English.

"I am going to tell them that I can't do it."

"They may kill you. Have you thought of that? Better stay here. They can do nothing now I know what they're after, and you are on my side."

"It is better that I should go. Harm might come to missy."

"You're right. But you won't tell them the reason why?"

"No, I won't tell them why."

IT WAS night time before Coffee made his way to the camp of Soapy and Squint. They gave him a cold welcome.

"Well you didn't do it —— you," snarled Squint. "He was down hat the claim today as husky-looking as ever. Is hit this yer lookin' fer?"

The light of the fire played on a long, wicked-looking dagger.

"Put that thing away, Squint. Perhaps there was a reason—eh, Coffee? There was a reason. You're a gentleman; you wouldn't throw down your pals, would you now?"

"Yes, there was a reason," replied Coffee. "I had it all fixed for him this morning, but the girl changed cups with him and of course I knocked it out of her hand. I didn't get another chance after that."

"There! Do you see, Squint?" exulted Soapy. "I told you there would be a reason."

"Hit sounds all right, but 'ow do we know 'e ain't lying? You know 'e tried to get out o' 'hit. 'Hare yer lyin', yeller-belly? 'Cause if you are you 'ad better say yer prayers."

Again Squint flashed the knife.

"No, I'm not lying — why should I? It all happened as I said this morning. But——"

His voice faltered and died away as he watched the knife in Squint's hand.

"But what?" Soapy prompted softly.

"I am not going to do it. The risk is too great. I've got nothing against Ivory, and——"

"—— you."

Simultaneously with the curse Squint's fist shot out and caught Coffee under the jaw. It felled him and before he could recover his footing Squint was upon him, knife in hand. Over and over they rolled, Coffee concentrating his strength to avert the deadly thrust he knew Squint was maneuvering for.

Soapy watched them for a while, then with a show of great haste and alarm rushed over to where they were struggling and caught Squint's slowly descending arm.

"Squint, Squint!" he cried. "Stop it, you fool. What do you want to go off half-cocked for?"

"——! you'd better let me finish 'im hoff while Hi'm in the mood fer hit. Hi bet 'e's blown the gaff."

"Don't be a fool. Would Ivory let him get away if he knew everything?"

"That's so."

"Well, come back to the fire — you too, Coffee—and let's drink and forget all this."

Soapy watched the two carefully as they acted on his suggestion, then whispered to Squint:

"Keep out of this—I can handle Coffee, don't you fret. He'll do anything I tell him; you see if he won't."

Three times the bottle went the rounds in silence. The two white men acted as if they were oblivious to Coffee's presence, and he, though he watched closely, could get no clue of the effect his statement had on Soapy. He was considering whether it would be possible to cut and run, when——

"Coffee!"

It was Soapy's voice, and the suddenness of it startled him.

"Yes, Soapy?"

"Why don't you want to go through with the plan?"

The tone was soft, silkily soft, but Coffee sensed a hidden menace.

"I am afraid, Soapy. You know what they'd do to me if I was ever caught!"

"Yes. You were afraid, of course."

Again there was silence.

"But that's not the real reason, Coffee."

"No," assented Coffee, not seeing for the moment the trap into which he had been led.

"And there is another reason?"

"Yes—no. I told you the real reason. I was afraid to do it."

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"But you said there was another reason. Come, don't lie to an old pal, Coffee. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Well," replied Coffee doggedly, "it's because I like the old man and the girl. They have treated me well."

"So you would go back on your pals because the old man and the girl treated you well. Tell me, did they treat you like a white man, like we have? No, you bet they didn't."

"She was good to me," murmured Coffee.

"Oh! It's *she* who treated you well, is it? Why, you poor fool, I bet she don't know you are alive. Now I'll tell you what you are going to do. You are going back there, and you'll see that the old man gets the right cup of coffee tomorrow morning.

"If the stuff acts as quickly as you say it does he ought to be out of the way by eight o'clock. But we'll be generous, we'll give you till noon.

"And I'll tell you why you're going to do it. I stopped Squint from sticking you like a pig a while ago, didn't I? If you go back on us you'll wish that I had not stopped him. We'll be watching you from the time you leave here until you signal that it's all done.

"Ah! And here's another thing. We mean to put this plan through whether you do your share or not. So don't think you are protecting the girl or Ivory by being balky.

"But ——!" went on Soapy, clapping Coffee jovially on the back. "There's no need for me to talk to you like this. It isn't half as risky as the killing of a native in a Bulawayo compound."

"I didn't do that."

"I know you didn't. But the police think you did, and I'm the only man that can prove you didn't. Have you ever thought of that?"

Coffee made no response.

"You can't make me believe that you are going to give up a certain chance of getting to America—to be rich—to live your own life your own way. Say, 'To —— with the rest.' You can't give up America, and that's what it means if you throw us down. Think of yourself—never mind about the others. They won't do anything for you."

"Yes, I'll think of myself," Coffee said impetuously. "To —— with the others. I can't give up America."

"That's the way to talk. That's the right spirit. Now let us forget all these unpleasant things and drink. Talking's dry work."

Again the bottle went the rounds. Gradually Squint forgot to be suspicious of Coffee, and Coffee's fear of Squint and his knife vanished. They talked of the wealth that was to be theirs, and the spirit of good fellowship seemed to dwell among them.

The night was yet young when Coffee rose to leave.

"Don't go yet, Coffee," said Squint. "Stay an' 'ave 'nother little drink."

"I must go now. I have to prepare the food for tomorrow's breakfast."

EARLY riser though Ivory was, his niece was waiting for him when he made his way to the mess-hut.

"Uncle Bill," she said breathlessly, "Sixpence has left us. He went this morning soon after sunup, and he asked me to give you this."

DEAR SIR:

The story I told you about the locket and the picture was a lie. I stole it from a man I once worked for. The rest was true though, but you don't need to worry about Soapy and Squint. I gave them a dose in their whisky last night, of the stuff meant for you. They'll sleep a long while—perhaps they will never wake—and you can make them prisoners. You'll know what to do with them.

COFFEE.

P. S. I've taken the nuggets and I'm going to try to make my way to Cape Town and America.

Ivory was spared the need of an explanation by some confusion outside the door.

"It's Dick," Grace cried excitedly, and ran out of the hut closely followed by Ivory.

Grace was not mistaken, and after the greetings had been exchanged she retired to the kitchen to prepare another breakfast.

"What are you doing round this way again so soon?" asked Ivory when they were alone. "Thought you weren't due for another couple of months."

"Special duty, sir," answered the young trooper. "Have been sent after three pretty bad eggs, and the funny part of it all is that I found two of them fast asleep in their camp not far from here. They acted as if they were drugged; I thought I would never be able to waken them."

"You mean Soapy and Squint?"

"Yes. Have they been giving you any trouble?"

"Some. Where are they now?"

"I've got 'em handcuffed to each other and leg-ironed to a tree. Thought I'd leave them there until I had roped in the third one. They said he was working for you."

"He was. What do you want him for?"

"Not much that can be proved. Mostly on suspicion."

"Well, he's not here now. He left at sunup this morning, and by this time should be well over the border. And to tell you the truth I'm not sorry he's got away."

"Why, Ivory——"

The policeman was puzzled.

"I can't explain now," said Ivory as Grace came toward them to tell them that "scoff" was ready, "but take it from me, for all his yellow hide Coffee's 'white.'"

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The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

HERE is a letter Theo. S. Solomons wrote to me when he sent us his story appearing in this issue:

Berkeley, California.

May, 21st, 1919, you wrote: "Once you wrote me about stories that gave real life instead of sacrificing it to the conventions of fiction. We're planning later on to do a stunt that would open up a chance right away for just this kind of story—the kind that is pretty sure to be refused by all magazines at present."

I AM slow but sure. I have selected the backbone of a story I once wrote, or thrice wrote, rather, and I guess I could have written it thrice times thrice without ever getting it published. You—to quote just one editor—said: "splendid material, but—it isn't organized right." No wonder. I took this "real life" rescue from the rotting glair-ice of a Klondike lake and dressed it up in a darn fool plot—just lugged or "drug" the plot in and threw it on top of the incident. I thought this would be a good thing for a first experiment in real life adventure—the kind I can't write diatribes against and anent and inflict them on you! Hey, what?

Now this is garnished just a little. It is from 95 to 98 per cent. FACT. I saw what I say I saw—minus the embellishment. That's neither here nor there however, for I haven't that invidious species of personal integrity that would stay my hand from *making up* real (!) stuff like this. My seven-year-old does it, so whine ell shouldn't I? This story is long for the matter in it. But that's part of the experiment, which—this time—is in the way of a very detailed picture to enhance life-likeness, graphicness, movingness.—THEO. S. SOLOMONS.

Our New Type

THIS number is thinner and has fewer pages than previous numbers. The paper shortage does it. But please note very carefully that *there is just as much in it as before.* The new type does it. If you understand just what we and all other magazines are up against I think you'll say that we've done the best that could be done for you our readers. For we're giving you just as much as you got before and we're doing it simply by changing to another type, a standard-sized type, exactly the same size *Everybody's* has used for years. And if you'll look back over magazines in general you'll find that a large number of the best ones have been using this size right along. So we're not "handing" you anything in making the change.

Our old type was a ten-point, the new is nine-point. (The smaller type used in Camp-Fire is eight-point; that on the Service Page and in the standing matter at the head of "Ask Adventure" is six-point.) But that small change from ten to nine enables us to save one-sixth of the amount of paper used and, believe me, that means a tremendous lot these days when paper is not only very high but hard to get at any price. And yet, if you will count or estimate the exact number of words of fiction in this issue and compare it with the number in previous issues, you will find that it is practically the same.

WITH ten-point type and 192 pages we averaged about 127,000 words of fiction per issue; with the new nine-point type and 160 pages I think you'll find, allowing for the varying size of "Camp-Fire," that you're getting just as many words of fiction as before. I'm writing this before the stories for this issue have all come down from the printer in type and I can't be any more exact than above until we have that definite testimony in hand, but the printers and we have been doing some close estimating, the change wasn't decided upon until we were convinced it could be made without cutting down the amount of your reading-matter and, so far as we can tell, you're just as likely to get a bit more as a bit less.

THIS paper shortage is real. Some one may be holding up a supply somewhere but that doesn't help *us* any, and the main cause seems to be that from 1917 on there hasn't been enough timber cut or enough mills operated. War, transportation, labor troubles, all these have been factors. If you have any doubts of the shortage, watch all the other magazines and note that, in one way or another, most or all of them are suffering as we are. Indeed, we are comparatively in good shape.

I'm not going to whine about our troubles, but I want you to understand them. If you do, you'll know that we are doing the best we can by you. I've already told you about our difficulties from transportation conditions. So far there is little improvement. And it makes

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us particularly sore that we can't get our magazines distributed on time, regularly, to all points and in sufficient quantity, for never before has the demand been so strong. That is pretty well proved by the fact that, in spite of everything, our magazine's circulation is going up steadily and has already reached a point far higher than ever before. If we can get anything like normal outside conditions, it looks as if we'd probably perform the little stunt of doubling our circulation in the present period of twelve months.

Meanwhile, well, like all other magazines, we're having our troubles. It's costing us work, worry, money and loss of entirely possible circulation. But, as instanced by this type change, we're trying to handle things so that our readers will keep on getting all we can give them.

SOME information and a query from Farnham Bishop in connection with his story in this issue:

Berkeley, California.

The double-barrelled cannon and its crazy projectile are no products of the imagination. Mr. Francis Bannerman has the gun in his store at 501 Broadway, New York. Only it is iron, not bronze, and was designed by a Southerner during the Civil War. It was tried out in the presence of the local Home Guard and the beauty and chivalry of the town. The missile behaved as in the story—danced all over the place, chased everybody off the premises and finally wound itself around a tree. I read about it years ago in some newspaper, saw a half-tone of the gun in Mr. Bannerman's catalogue, and thought it was a sad pity it was never used in action. I moved the scene to Mexico because our Yank and Reb grandfathers didn't stampede easily, and there was mighty little comedy about their battles.

Perhaps some Southern reader of the Camp-Fire could oblige with the name of the inventor of the double-barrelled gun and of the place where it fired its first and last shot.—FARNHAM BISHOP.

ANOTHER comrade, whom some of us have seen with Buffalo Bill's Wild West back in 1883-4 or later with Fore augh's Circus and Wild West or other companies, stepping out in defense of Wild Bill Hicock as marshal, scout and Indian-fighter, gives interesting details concerning his death and the fate of his killer:

New York City.

I saw a letter to the Camp-Fire signed by a man writing under the name of "Deuce." From the tone of his letter he doesn't have much use for Wild Bill. In fact, in some of his statements he is away off. He claims that Wild Bill was never a scout or Indian-fighter. I would advise "Deuce" to read the book, "Boots and Saddles," in which General George Custer states that Wild Bill was one of his best and most reliable scouts. If Wild Bill was with Custer during the Indian wars of Western Kansas he could not be hanging around Springfield, Mo., at that time drinking whisky.

HE ALSO goes on to say that Wild Bill never made good as a marshal of any of the towns. How is it that, when Wild Bill cleaned up a town of all the bad men, other towns would send for him to come and clean up their towns? If such was the case I can't see where "Deuce" gets to think of Wild Bill being a four-flusher, as in that time towns in that part of the country would not have a man as marshal unless he would make good.

HE ALSO states that Wild Bill killed a cowboy by the name of McCall, a brother of Jack McCall that afterward killed Wild Bill. I will say from well-known facts that Jack McCall had no brother.

In the Spring of 1876 Charlie Utter (Colorado Charlie) was fitting out his outfit in Cheyenne, Wyo., to go to the Black Hills with freight. Wild Bill was in town, and Charlie Utter asked him to take the trip with him. About this time a noted character drifted into Cheyenne. A woman known by the name of Calamity Jane. A woman well known to be without fear of any kind. Hearing Colorado Charlie was going to Deadwood, made arrangements to go along. Jack McCall was one of the drivers in the outfit.

AFTER the outfit arrived in Deadwood, McCall lost all of his money gambling, and he would go to Wild Bill for money. Of course McCall could go to camp to eat and sleep, but at that Wild Bill would lend him a little spending money now and then. It was then rumored around Deadwood that the law-abiding people were going to make Wild Bill marshal. This so worked up the thieves and crooked gamblers that they set out to find a man to do away with Wild Bill, as they knew if ever he became marshal that he would run the thieves out of town and make the crooked gamblers half-way behave themselves. The only man they could find to do the job was this same Jack McCall. As Wild Bill knew him, he would have the best chance.

ONE day, while Wild Bill was sitting in a card-game, McCall came in and stepped behind Wild Bill. Wild Bill looked at him as he did so, saw who it was, and went on playing. McCall waited for about a minute, pulled his gun and shot Wild Bill through the back of the head, the ball going through his head and coming out of the face, hitting the table and breaking a mirror in back of the bar. Wild Bill's head fell forward, and before his head hit the table, he had dropped his cards, threw both of his hands on to his six-shooters and had them half-way out of the holster. McCall turned his gun on to the crowd and backed to the door and then made a run for a horse that stood saddled at the back. In his hurry to mount, the saddle turned and he fell to the ground. Before he could get up the crowd caught him.

As there was no court of justice in Deadwood, he was given what was called a Miner Trial, and during the trial McCall stated that Wild Bill had killed his brother at Hays City, Kansas, and that that was the first chance he had of getting even with him. As the miners take for their text, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," that cleared him. McCall was given five hours to leave town. He walked outside the court and on the street there stood a horse all saddled and bridled. On the saddle was hanging a six-shooter, a belt of cartridges and a Winchester

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rifle. He mounted and waved his hand to the crowd and hit the trail toward Custer City.

AT THIS time Colorado Charlie was up at Gayville, looking after some business, so he did not hear of the killing of Wild Bill for some hours after the trial. When he did he dropped all business and took up the trail of McCall. McCall never stopped until he reached Custer City. In the first saloon he went into for a drink he started to boast that he had killed Wild Bill the day before in Deadwood. The marshal of Custer City at that time was an old friend of Wild Bill's, from Hays City, Kansas, and he placed him under arrest. A little over an hour later Colorado Charlie came in and offered to guarantee to the marshal that five minutes after McCall was loose he would never bother anybody else. McCall was afterward taken to Yankton, there given a fair trial, and hung for the killing of Wild Bill.

Now if "Deuce" wants to take the trouble to look up the records of that trial, he will see that one of the sisters of McCall while on the stand testified that she had no other brother but the prisoner, and that knocked the Deadwood evidence out.

"DEUCE" also stated that Wild Bill aped the manners of Buffalo Bill. You must stop and think that, as Wild Bill was almost ten years older than Buffalo Bill, Buffalo Bill could only have been a boy at that time. So I do not think there could have been much aping done.

After the killing of Wild Bill, Calamity Jane got drunk, rode up and down the streets of Deadwood, dressed in buckskin, telling the people that had anything to do with the killing of Wild Bill what she thought of them, also California Joe when he got back from Mead City, where he had been after some Indians that had stolen some stock.—"SETH" HATHAWAY.

THE Incas. Edgar Young advances an interesting theory, giving considerable information along the way. I wonder how much we "civilized" Americans could learn and profit from the old Incas' system of government. Note, too, the similarity to the system f Tens (and higher decimal units) advanced in "Looking Ahead for Democracy" some time ago. Until I read Mr. Young's letter, however, I had not heard of the Inca system, being only faintly familiar with the Inca civilization.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Walter Johnson tells me that some one wrote in and tried to make it appear that he and I did not know what we were talking of when we mentioned Incas. This got away from me while I was working for the War Department. I never saw it.

IF ANY one should bob up with an idea like that, turn him loose on me. I am quite familiar with the *accepted* version of Inca history and government from Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, first Inca and his sister-wife, who appeared mysteriously upon the shores of Lake Titicaca, down to and through the conquest. I say *accepted* version because a man with half an eye can see that the accounts given by the conquerors themselves are tissues of lies inspired both by the Church and the Spanish Government. We are asked to believe that 162 Spaniards slew 20,000 Indians in one day and other such incongruities. Garcilasso de la Vega, a half-breed Inca, was living in Spain at the time he wrote his history, and we may be sure that nothing crept into his account that was not strictly censored.

The only truth I have ever run across was contained in the dying confession made to Philip II by one of the last of the conquistadores, which has come to light recently, in which he says the Incas were better people than the Spanish conquerors, that not a thief or immoral woman existed among them, and that there was no poverty.

IT IS a fact that there was *a race* of Incas, rulers of the Indians. The empire took in all of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and a great part of Chili. The capital was at Cuzco, and the empire was divided into four parts from there: Chinchay-suyu, to the north; Anti-suyu, to the east; Colla-suyu, to the south; and Cunti-suyu, to the west. Each of these four parts was ruled by a viceroy, under whom were officers ruling over 1,000, 500, 100, 50 and 10, all Incas. There were many other *tucuyricocs*, or inspectors, directly under the chief ruler in Cuzco, who went around seeing that the others ruled correctly. The entire Inca realm was called Ttahuantin-suyu. They were living in a state of perfect Socialism when Pizarro arrived and I am quite sure offered little resistance when he captured their emperor, on the pretext of inviting him to dinner, and held him for ransom. The ransom amounted to $17,000,000. The room in which it was collected is still intact. The priest who accompanied Pizarro gave Atahualpa the choice of embracing Christianity and being choked to death or not doing so and being roasted alive. This was after he had been promised his freedom if he collected the gold for them. Atahualpa took the former course to "shuffle off."

IN DIGGING back through ancient Persian history before the battle of Marathon (490 B. C.) when Persia (or Irania) was master of Western Asia I have come upon data which solves the mystery of the first two Incas. I wish I had time to work this up. It is original so far as I am concerned and I have arrived at it by using common sense. I am surprised that it has been overlooked all this time. I have been trying for many years to place the country from which these first two Incas came, for I am not a very strong believer in the supernatural. The trouble has been that men have been misled into thinking the first Incas came there a few hundreds of years before the Spaniards themselves arrived. This has been caused by the exact data that was given in the Indian traditions, and is very simple to explain: the traditions were handed down from one to the other teachers of the people by the means of knotted cords and were understudied and learned verbatim and according to my belief came down in this manner from about 300 B. C. The only thing we have to do is to get one of the wise men concerning ancient Persian history turned loose on the Inca question and it will soon be cleared up.

Here's the tradition: (I didn't mean to go into this stuff)—

MANCO Capac and Mama Ocllo suddenly appeared (full grown) in a cradle in Lake Titicaca. They found the Indians (who yet speak the *lingoa geral* of all other South-American Indians)

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living in caves, holes in the ground, and otherwise like wild animals and tame beasts (similar to the way the Fuegians yet live). They said their father, the Sun, had sent them to teach and rule the Indians. Manco Capac carried a long rod of gold and, followed by the Indians and accompanied by his sister-wife, he started out looking for a likely spot to begin his empire. Arriving at what was later Cuzco, he stuck this rod in the ground, out of sight, and said that would be the city he would found.

He began teaching the Indians how to make clothes for themselves, to cultivate the ground, domesticate the native animals, and live like rational human beings. (Bear in mind the *andenes*, or terraces, which they made on the mountain sides, and those of parts of China). His wife began teaching the women how to weave cloth, make clothes for themselves, cook, and run the household. The traditions say they did these things and they must have done so, for when the Spaniards arrived they found them living in houses built of stone of which the equal is not now to be found in the whole world, blocks of stone fitted together without the use of mortar so close that a knife-blade can not be inserted, and some of them of such colossal size as to stagger the imagination with the amount of work required to hew them out and get them in place.

He knew the value of gold and had it collected into a public treasury. If it was not a matter of history how much gold the Spaniards sent back from this place it would be unbelievable the amount they had. And the amount they didn't get was possibly more, for when the Inca sacerdotes saw that the Spaniards were gold-hungry and were without honor they threw great quantities of it in the lakes and otherwise disposed of it, thinking to rid themselves of the invaders.

From these two began the race of Incas, kings of the many tribes of Indians who were to be found in those countries, raising an inbred race, for they did not allow the Indians to marry into the royal blood, and ruling by love and service.

The rod of gold that Manco Capac carried was possibly a sword of bronze and the manner in which he buried it might have to do with his former history.

USING a grain of salt with the narration of Garcilasso de la Vega (for he was the son of a Spanish conqueror by an Inca princess, educated in a Catholic school, and living in Spain at the time he wrote his account, which he claims he got from the lips of a learned Inca at Cuzco when he was a boy), we can piece together and visualize the entire Inca rule down to the conquest. One fact I get that has been overlooked. Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo were dressed in a peculiar fashion and had *very large ears*. Ever since I read about those large ears I have been studying ancient portraits and history for peculiar headdress or ear-rings that would make one appear to have large ears. I drew as many as fifty books at a time from the large libraries here and in New York and studied the old prints and pictures of people, and images of them carved on stone monoliths, and went over the collections of old idols and statues in the museums. It never occurred to me that people existed who had those large ears. I have located them on both ancient Indian (of India) and ancient Persian portraits and pictures of statues, which proves that the old Medes, Persians, Bactrians and Parthians, the group being Iranians, and the ancient Indians (of India) were of a common origin. This fact is accepted by men learned in the history of these two races.

ALL right. The ancient Iranians and Indians (of India) descended from a common stock. And of this common stock came also Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, the first two Incas. The avesta, or bible, of the Iranians with its Ahura-mazda (god) and Angra-mainu (devil) is that of a religion refined from the pure sun-worship of the people who went before. It is the book from which our own Bible was taken almost literally, with changes so slight as to be negligible. Back behind our Bible we find the avesta, and back behind the avesta was the religion to which Manco Capac belonged.

The word "insha" and its meaning in the avesta is worthy of notice. In rough words it means "a history of rule." The hyphenated words in it are so similar to some words and names that descended from the Incas as to be startling. Many names, especially of places, in the highlands of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and other countries where the Incas held sway are not of Quichua origin, nor of any other Indian language origin, but words foreign to their language, and compared with Iranian words and Hindu words, making allowances for distortion by handing down by tradition through unfamiliar tongues, are very interesting.

Also CUZCO WAS A HOLY CITY. A man who had been to Cuzco and was coming away was considered superior to one on his way to the city. Does this shed any light? The strings of knotted cords that Manco Capac taught the Indians to preserve their traditions with were the same knotted cords he had seen his own people using to do the same thing in his own country, and one look at a string of Catholic beads will send the imagination flying back to their origin. The Inca religion and the Catholic religion were *one and the same thing* but one several generations ahead of the other, caused by Inca inbreeding and the natural stupidity of the people they ruled, but far ahead in devotion and sincerity. A man leaving home in the Inca empire had only to leave a stick across his door to show that he was not at home and no one would enter even if he had things within of great value. "And when they saw that we had thieves among us they despised us."

Here is the mystery solved:

LOOK on any globe of the earth and note the two strong currents that leave the China, and even present Persian, coast and cross the Pacific and wash the west shores of Peru and Northern Chili. A boat, even a small one, if it got in that current and nothing happened to it would finally arrive on the west coast of South America. And one did arrive there. I can see Manco Capac and his wife describing it in *sign language* after they had climbed the mountains and woven a small boat to cross Titicaca in, looking for populated country. They stood there and the Indians came and regarded them as great curiosities. They signed that they came far, far, from the west (pointing) and at the little boat they had made, and at the water of Lake Titicaca and made rocking motions that they had come all the way in a boat.

Here's the way Garcilasso de la Vega got it from the lips of an old Inca when he was a boy (Mozans' translation).

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"Our Father, the Sun, seeing the human race in the condition I have described, living like wild beasts, without religion or government or towns or houses; without cultivating the land or clothing their bodies, for they knew not how to weave cotton or wool to make clothes, living in caves or clefts in the rocks, or in the caverns under the ground, eating the herbs of the field, and roots and fruit, like wild animals, also human flesh. . . . With these commands and intentions our Father, the Sun, placed his two children in the lake of Titicaca, which is eighty leagues from here, and he said to them that they might go where they pleased, and that, at every place where they stopped to eat or sleep, they were to thrust a scepter of gold into the ground, which was half a yard long and two fingers in thickness. . . ."

INASMUCH as Manco Capac could not talk to them he had to resort to sign language. Visualize the signs one would have had to make to explain the many things he had to tell, his trip and his religion. He is said by the traditions to have ruled about forty years, and probably was never able to explain fully in their own simple language, and possibly his own children were unable to explain when they ruled after him. Perhaps his own language was primitive enough. Yet we have two leaks. He was a man of marvelous genius and if we had his verbatim account it might prove enlightening. The Spaniards killed the wise men who spoke the story to the multitude in the temples from the knotted cords, *quipus*, and Garcilasso de la Vega, the boy, whose mother was an Inca princess, heard the story at second-hand from one who had heard it told long before when he was young. And he had been educated in the religion of his father, the alien conqueror, and was doubtless more in sympathy with his father's people than with the noble race from which he descended on his mother's side, for he left and went to Spain and lived there the rest of his life without coming back. — —— with him!

Here's to Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, first adventurers to reach these shores, who began a reign of love and service, the like of which has never been known before or since on the face of the earth, man and woman with hearts of purer gold than that which now lies buried in the bottom of Lake Titicaca.—EDGAR YOUNG.

A FEW curiosity-exciting words from Romaine H. Lowdermilk about his story in this issue. And about the can.

Wickenburg, Ariz.

I must lay bare a fact that will forever destroy my chances for becoming the President of the United States. Simply this: I've been in the can. You know, you Adventurers, how easy it is to get into the can. Well, I got there too. I'm not going to commit myself by telling the grand total of my trips to the shady spot, nor enlarge on the various trivial offenses contributing toward those pleasant hours of indolence. I'll merely say that when I began "Thees Eees the Hombre" I was there.

Seems like most folks who have enjoyed a sojourn in the resounding belly of a stationary "tank" think they could—and should—write a story about it. Well, I thought that way too. So I began, but before I got very far along I could see my Ms. was simply a document chock full of state's evidence against me. So I shifted the scenery a little, brought on new actors, turned the spot-light just as far away from my own alleged misdeeds as the stage setting would permit and now you're the audience who, by the simple act of purchasing this copy of *Adventure*, have bought the ticket that lets you see the show. I hope you'll like it. It's a hard job to write a short-story and I have expended much labor to make this one both interesting and true to life. I've not overdrawn nor lied about anything. But people, I sure left out a lot!—ROMAINE H. LOWDERMILK.

WE'VE already discussed South American shrunken heads. Thanks to one of us, here's another look-in on the subject from the une 29, 1918, issue of the *West Coast Leader* of Lima, Per :

The West Coast Leader
Calle Boza 830, Lima, Peru.
P. O. Box 1265

Mr. J. M. Mercer of W. R. Grace & Co. has requested me to forward you the attached *West Coast Leader* containing the story of a reported "head-factory" at Guayaquil. The Guayaquil merchant referred to in the story is a man by the name of ——, I believe, who is well known in that port and has an established business. —— told the story to a friend of mine and declared that he had been inside the "factory" and had seen the heads in question.—C. N. GRIFFIS, Manager.

The "Head Factory" of Guayaquil

"And if you doubt the tale I tell,
Go where the South Pacific swell," etc.
—*Kipling.*

The curious and grewsome art of shrinking an adult human head to approximately one-fourth its normal size has long been one of the minor mysteries of the Amazon basin. This art or craft has been regarded as the exclusive secret of a certain tribe or tribes of Indians dwelling on the northern tributaries of the upper Amazon. Guayaquil on the West Coast and Para on the East Coast have been the principal tidewater markets for these uncanny objects—the human head shrunk to a miniature with long hair hanging down.

You can pick them up in jeweler's shops in Lima mounted on a small stick, but they will cost you anywhere from 20 to 50 pounds sterling. The manner in which these heads are shrunk, as far as we are aware, no scientist has attempted to explain. Even the question of whether the bones are first taken from the head or whether the bones are likewise shrunk is a moot point, with the evidence more in favor of the boneless theory than otherwise.

In connection with these heads we have recently received what is apparently authentic information that, while astounding in character, is not lacking in points of probability.

Going up Coast on a *calatera* a few weeks ago, our informant chanced to meet a Guayaquil merchant and in the course of conversation the subject of heads came up. Whether on the East or West Coasts, it may be noted, these heads are always bobbing up in conversations just as they bob up in shop windows. They are irrepressible jacks-in-the box and they smack of the Amazonian wilderness, reed huts, sluggish brown rivers crawling like snakes

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through jungle that is dark at noonday. Your carefully groomed tourist balancing one on the tip of his fingers over the counter of a shop in Lima is fascinated by that impish, silent head—because it harps back through the ineradicable savage strain within him to the dusk of centuries when his own ancestors howled about wood-fires at night and a man head swinging on a stick or string was the finest possession obtainable in all the world.

Leaving the philosophy of heads, however, and returning to our story, the Guayaquil merchant offered to secure for his acquaintance a fine specimen of the shrunken head if he desired one for the small sum of 15 or 20 pounds sterling. "But," said he, "this particular head you might not regard as legitimate. In fact, the great majority of heads marketed on this coast nowadays fall into the same class. I will tell you why. Among the minor industries of Guayaquil we have a head-factory!

"That will sound a somewhat crazy statement to you. But I know it as a matter of fact, for I have visited the place. The man who shrinks these heads may have learned the secret from the Indians of the interior or he may not. I went to his place one day and he led me back into a rear room where he pulled out a large tin can and emptied it out on the floor. There must have been forty or fifty of these shrunken heads in the can. He told me that he did the shrinking himself.

"He secured the heads from dead bodies, paupers, or perhaps through the intermediary of body-snatchers. Then he boiled them in a certain secret preparation for three or four days. At the end of that time the shrinking process was completed. He mounted them and obtained good prices.

"At the present time, however, he told me the head market was poor. Owing to the war, perhaps. It is a difficult business to handle. You must exercise a certain secrecy in securing your raw materials and in marketing the product. Moreover, you must not overload the market. It's a limited market and must be watched carefully.

"While the merchant was talking I bent down and picked up one of the heads and looked at it, for though the skin was browned there was a very startling resemblance to A——, an old friend of mine who used to work on the Guayaquil & Quito Railway. He died a year and a half ago from yellow fever and as far as we knew had been decently buried. I could not get that resemblance out of mind, and later asked the head manufacturer and merchant if he would loan me this particular head. I had a friend who might wish to buy it. He readily assented and I carried the head over to the G. & Q. offices, where it was passed around among the men who had worked with A——. To a man they declared it was A——'s head. I took the head back. There was no absolute proof, of course, and we didn't want to make a public scandal over the matter. It would not have done poor old A—— any good to have his head fought over in a Guayaquil court like a band of Borneo wild men.

"Now that's my story. You may believe it or not, but I tell you that I saw the forty or fifty heads with my own eyes."

A WORD from Roy P. Churchill about *Stormy* in his story in this issue. Also Mr. Churchill is starting a new bit of slang. It looks good. Let's see how far it will get.

Santa Barbara, California.

Another *Stormy Jones* yarn. I like *Stormy* myself. I found him sitting well back in a half-dark conning tower on board the *Minneapolis*, scrubbing clothes. It was soon after the armistice and everybody else on the ship wanted to know when in the —— they were going to be released, to get back to the dear old soda-fountain and the farm. What worried *Stormy* was that there were not enough days to go round to do all the things he had booked. Thought maybe he might have to ship over to get them all in. In other words, *Stormy* was the potential "thirty-year man," the kind of Navy man who, when the time came, trained forty or fifty or a hundred to their jobs in the war. They made some of them full lieutenants and they got away with the job.

And so there is *Stormy* as I saw him.

Hope you like the "Gong-Beater." It means, of course, a hot-air merchant and a spreader of the good old bull, and if these expressions are passé, why not gong-beater?—ROY P. CHURCHILL.

FROM one of us whose adventures began before the war:

U. S. S. *Lake View.*

I was spending part of my time in the powder mills (mostly DuPont's at Carney's Point, N. J. Any old-timer will know Slim of C Line Plant No. 1) and part on the sea. I have been on English horse boats as seaman and have seen on one trip two mutinies, and while going through the sub-zone (then five hundred miles from the English coast) had a drunken crew of horsemen breaking bottles against the bulkhead and raising ——. We were running without any lights, and a full lookout. Then I have (during the war) been on a ship in mid-ocean with a fire on board, and all hands fighting it for their life. I have seen a torpedo just miss the stern of the ship on which I was armed guard (Gun's Crew) and hit the ship just abaft us. I have seen ships shooting rockets so that they could see the sub to fire at it. That's just a few things, but some day I will tell more about having buildings blown up and seeing men running around, their clothes afire and run till they drop dead. I have seen a blending tower blow up and take twenty men with it.—JOHN T. WELSH.

A LETTER from an old-timer of the West telling us more about one of the famous characters of early days:

Los Angeles, Cal.

I have just had the pleasure of reading Mr. Brininstool's story about Tom Smith, but he told only a few of his many good and brave deeds. In July and August, 1868, I was at Green River, Wyoming. The U. P. Railroad was at Bills Creek. The advance population was made up of all kinds of people. The town of Green River made up from tents to a few adobe houses—sporting girls, gamblers, a few merchants, and thieves to beat the band. Robbery and murder were the main business night and day.

TOM SMITH was made city marshal. He talked to a crowd of over two thousand people. He told them that they must not expect any mercy when they were caught in a crime—that he was not a gun-man or a prize fighter, but he was marshal and would protect innocent people from abuse. Jack Briston, a drunken gun-man, gave a yell and

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started for Smith, but Smith gave him such a punch that he had to be carried away that night. Jo Bean got busy in a dance-tent. Smith told him to go to his camp, as Bean was a noted prize-fighter. That was too much to take and right there they went at it. Smith won, but it was a hard fight. Then Smith made Bean a help-mate. The two worked together and the town was quiet for a few days.

Patsy Marly came in and challenged Bean to fight. In the talk Patsy Marly called Smith some name, and Smith won another fight. Big Bennet, a prize-fighter, got after them all for a fight; he got one with Jim McQuire. Then, when the crowd broke into the ring, Tom Smith got busy and stopped the fight. Bennet told Smith he was standing in with the crowd for popularity. That made Smith call him down and Smith cleaned Bennet out.

Then some of the very worst came in from the grading camp and for a month a perfect hell was kept up. In August the town started to move forward to Bear River; there the big fight occurred. Smith went over their breastworks and took out a desperado; Smith got shot and was taken to a hospital.

THAT was the last heard from him until he was made marshal of Abilene.

Smith found many good people to back him, but he never waited for any pal to go ahead. He always beat them to it. He was a quiet, easy talking man, never drinking, never seen dancing in the dens. His weight was about 165 pounds, very slim, dark eyes and hair, polite to all—even to those rough-necks in and around the dance-houses.

I have never seen his equal for bravery. I understood he was struck by an ax in the hands of a thief when Smith was handcuffing a man. I always had a kind feeling for him. His principles were of the very best in mankind—he deserved a monument. He was a man among men.—CLARK B. STOCKING.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

YOU know how long I've been hammering on the point that the fundamentals of good citizenship ought to be taught in the public schools. Well, Grand Rapids, Michigan, with a population of one hundred and thirty-two thousand is doing it.

I don't mean that they're doing it as a result of my hammering, and I claim no credit for their movement, but Mr. Frank L. Dykema, executive secretary of the Americanization Society of Grand Rapids, has been in touch with me by letter for a year or two and I've followed their work with great interest.

When it began, it confined its efforts to getting the voters to vote and began on women voters. The figures show that for the March, 1919, primaries Grand Rapids stood head and shoulders above other cities of the State in percentage of women registered. That just as an illustration of results. It was splendid work but it seemed to me it would have to be broadened in order to live. They came to the same decision and acted upon it. I believe they'll have to broaden and deepen it still more—and that they themselves will see the need and meet it. Meanwhile what they are now doing is splendid and I'm hoping the rest of the country will see the value—and the necessity—of the Grand Rapids plan in one form or another.

LATER I'll give you the practical, working details. For this time some of the brief essays written by the children themselves are enough to make any of us do a deal of thinking. If such principles are being planted in these American children at an age when impressions and ideas take hard hold, what are going to be the practical results when these children grow up into citizens? Are they likely to be as indifferent and ignorant in such matters as we have been? What if all the children of the country were trained into similar ideals?

In a later issue I'll try to give you the outline of the Grand Rapids citizenship course as it is taught—and why not put a similar course into your own schools? But this time please look at the results. And think over the possibilities. Note that, unlike most "Americanization" movements, Grand Rapids, smug in satisfaction over the lovely and perfect Americanism of the native-born, is not merely teaching the foreign-born. Grand Rapids realizes that the native-born need teaching in real Americanism as much as do the foreign-born—and get less.—A. S. H.

GRACE ACTOR
Burton School, Grade 6-1

The American Government is governed by the

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people by means of voting. If people do not vote it is their fault that we have poor officials. Citizenship means that each person gives a fair deal to others. The anarchist and the other people who ignore our Government are both destroying it, only the anarchist destroys it violently and the people who ignore it, slowly. The people who do not vote are not fair to the others who do.

Some aliens come here to enjoy all our privileges without becoming citizens. They save their money and go back to their old country. These people are bad aliens who wreck our Government. But some aliens appreciate our Government and are now of the best citizens we have. Over the top! Go to the polls! Cast your ballot! Every man and woman must vote on election day. The Americanization Society is making good citizens out of everybody. Join hands with the American Government. Mother, do not let dad do it alone!

JOE DEVRIES
Hall School, Grade 5-1

Every person should vote. Here are a few reasons for voting. Supposing a schoolroom had a garden club. And supposing one-half of the room worked hard all Summer long, weeding the garden carefully and taking great care not to step on the plants. Now, if the other half of the room did not work, and still got the benefit of the garden, you would say it was unfair. It is the same way with the government, the people who vote are the ones who plant the seeds and pull the weeds. The people who do not vote are the ones who trample on the plants, and spoil the government.

PRISCILLA CROWLEY, Age 10 Years
Coit School, Grade 5-1

The American government is the government by the people. The people govern by voting for officials to carry on the business of the government and make the laws. If only part voted and we had bad officials in the offices, then those who stayed at home would be to blame. If nobody voted we would have no government.

Suppose a great oak was in a field, and a tornado came up and blew the tree over, and the owner of the field burned the oak. It would be destroyed quickly. If he had left it to rot, it would be destroyed also. The results are the same but burning it would be much quicker.

We have here in this country some people called anarchists. They go around blowing up buildings; in time they would destroy our government. The people who do not vote are as bad as the anarchists and they too, will destroy our government. Here the results are the same but the anarchists' methods tear the government down much faster.

If you don't want the U. S. Government to be destroyed, you must vote. In our room we have a Washington Club, and we pay dues, to do good things. Suppose our club would pick strawberries this Summer and all would work faithfully. If we brought all we earned to school and divided it, it would be fair and each would receive his equal share. But if part of them did not do their work well and some did not do any work well, and some did not do any work, it would not be fair to divide our earnings.

If some children from a different place should come to our room and share our pleasures and progress and would not join our club or pay the dues they would not be honest with the members.

Some people come over here from foreign countries. They earn their living and make their homes here. They don't become citizens, but enjoy our good laws and never help make them. Such people are called aliens. Our city is a large family. Each person has his duty to perform. If he fails to do his duty some one else will have to do it. The people in our city can do their duty by voting for men to carry on the city affairs. The soldiers did their duty and it wouldn't be any more than fair for you to do your duty. When the soldiers were given a command, they didn't pretend they were sick. They went "over the top." You can go "over the top" by voting. Citizenship means giving every one around you a square deal. You can do so by voting every election day.

CHARLES MERRYMAN
Michigan School, Fifth Grade

Every person should vote if he is a good citizen of the United States. If you do not vote, you are not a good citizen. If every person voted what a good state we would have. But if half of the people did not, what a poor state we would have. The people who do not vote are just like robbers because the people who do not vote are protected by the laws just as much as the people who voted. So let's all get together and vote. I aked my father to vote but he did not vote. Now he is sorry and he said he would vote the next time.

PAUL LITTLE
Sibly School, Grade 6-2

It is the duty of every American citizen to vote on every election day because the success of the government depends upon the faithfulness of all of the people. The government of this country is a republican or representative form of government. If only a few people voted on election days the men elected would only represent a few and not all of the people. Then there would not be a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

The people that do not vote on every election day are unfair to others because they leave their duties for others to perform. Suppose there was a picnic and all of the ladies would bring the food and they all came and just half of them brought some and the other half came and ate the picnic dinner. They would not play fair to the other ladies who had worked hard to prepare the food.

The American citizens should vote for capable men for office and shun the men who want to bribe them for their vote. He should vote for honest men having a good character. Some men think of themselves and money and what they can get out of office instead of how they can best serve the people. We should try to keep such men out of office.

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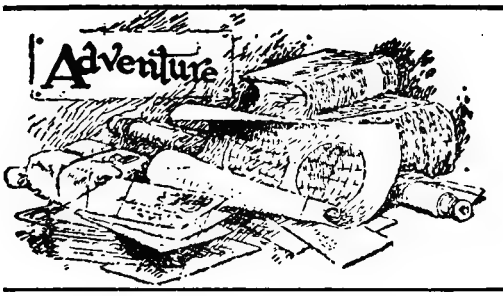

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THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

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Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

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In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

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Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: 1919 complete, twenty-four numbers $1.75, not including postage.—Address A. SCHUMAKER, 2151 Morris Ave., Bronx, New York. Tel. Fordham 2412.

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While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send i under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

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General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliablity. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

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CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the Bristish Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodrcaft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

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8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
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9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
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10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10 st., Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico; Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* Magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topograpny, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.; southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing, explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

32. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S. its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

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The Native-Son Lie

THIS malicious story about Easterners not being wanted in California has spread through the country like poison ivy and done untold damage. It seems incredible that any sensible man can believe that he will not be welcome in a land where the majority of its people have come from his own section. Do you? Then read the straight truth from Mr. Harriman who has lived thirty-four years on the Pacific Coast:

Question:—"I have wanted to come to California to stay a year or two but have held back because of stories I've heard about the native son. I have been told that a fellow from the East can not get a job there, the slogan being—California for Californians. Is this true?

Should I find business opportunities there better for me than in the East, I probably would remain. I am thirty-nine years old, know a few trades and therefore am independent. Am an artist, mechanical draftsman, stained-glass designer, and can also work in leaded glass and lamp shades. Am a mechanic; also can repair clocks, watches, cameras, etc. Have had twenty-five years' experience.

I would prefer outdoor work, if possible and have heard there are exceptional opportunities in the salmon business. How about it?"—W. H. Osborne, Weehawken, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—To begin with your first question regarding a Californian boycott on outsiders let me say this—one minute of serious consideration should prove to any thinking man that this is a libel; drop the last syllable if you like. How can it be possible that such a condition exists when the State is filled, crammed, jammed with Eastern men? How can any reasonable being promulgate any such guff when a little use of his brains would tell him that it is impossible?

Here I sit in a city of nearly six hundred thousand, ninety per cent. of its inhabitants people who were born in the East and Middle West, and every little while some man writes from the East asking me this question. It is as silly as it would be for me to write you, asking if it is true that all New Jersey men wore tails and slept in trees.

Now this may read like scolding, but I don't mean it that way. I am not throwing any rocks at you, but I would enjoy getting my hooks on the idiotic creator of such a report. I would enjoy scrubbing his visage in the grit of a macadamized road.

Just mark this—60,000 Iowa people attended a picnic here last Fall. Why should they bar their neighbors in Ottumwa and East Pleasant Plain from coming here and doing business?

There were 23,000 Buckeyes here in 1892. Why should they tell the folks back in Hinckley Corners and Sharon that no more Buckeyes need apply? There are more Suckers here than they have in Chicago, since it gathered unto itself such a foreign-born population. Why deny right of labor and its reward to a Sucker?

I was born in Ohio. I have lived here thirty-four years and never yet heard of a case where any question was raised regarding such a point. This report is like many others—born of some man's jealousy. There are some in the East and Middle West that are exactly like the old woman whose son went to sea.

"Don't lie to me, John! It is ridiculous to tell me there are fish that fly. They can't do it. Oh, yes, of course I believe you saw rivers of rum and mountains of sugar in Cuba. Every one knows we get our rum and sugar from there. Now, you are talking sense."

If I should write a story of this section, wherein I made a grizzly walk down into our city, climb the courthouse and sit on its roof, with every human taking cover promptly, there are some who would give that fool yarn more credence than they would if I told them that Orange County, tiny as it is, raised fifteen million dollars worth of citrus fruits last year. I have been charged with lying because I mentioned a geranium hedge six feet tall, when in reality it stood nine foot.

I can not prophesy concerning any man's business success. I can only tell of conditions as they are and let him judge his chances.

We have four or five factories where they make stained-glass pieces in lead and hard metal. We have machine shops, planing mills, clock and watch repairing establishments, many electrical shops. Business is on the move and coming ahead fast all along the coast.

As to salmon—the men who catch salmon make large sums during the three short seasons. Fifty to a hundred dollars a night for one man is not at all uncommon. The salmon run in Spring, Summer and Fall, a different kind each time. As to the truth of tales told, I know cases of success in many lines that read like a fairy tale but they are not the invariable rule, but the exceptions.

Here are a few instances: One friend began in a room sixteen by twenty-four with secondhand furniture. In eight years he had a store, a real one. In twenty years he had a building seven stories high, all devoted to furniture, carpets and draperies. Then he retired, wealthy.

Another friend went nearly broke in the hardware business in 1914. He went into the country, got twenty acres in a frostless belt on long time by giving two lots worth about $1,500 as the first payment. In two years he got hold of twenty-seven acres more. Today his place is worth $40,000 and he cleared $500 an acre on Winter peas last year. He has less than $5,000 debt.

Another friend has gone from a tiny beginning in stained glass to a large factory and a highly satisfactory income.

Still another has risen from being an electrician who made about $1,200 a year to a master electrician with a business that pays over $6,000 a year, and has done it in fourteen years.

I know scores of cases where the beginner of ten to twenty years ago is now the capitalist of the present.

I know one man personally, who had just $3,600 to his name twenty years ago and is now possessed of half a million—just because he had an unbounded faith in California farm land. For years he had from 1,000 to 13,000 acres under cultivation in Sacramento Valley.

You can hardly name any kind of business without my being able to point to one or more men who have made fortunes in it right here.

The whole country has been growing so fast that the possible markets have enlarged incredibly.

In 1900 there was not a white man in Imperial

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Valley. Last year it produced over thirty-two million dollars worth, ranging from fat cows to long-fiber cotton and from Duroc Jersey swine to Leghorn hens.

Petaluma, above San Francisco Bay, hatched 12,000,000 chickens in March and held a carnival over it.

You should get the monthly bulletins from The California Development Board, Ferry Building, San Francisco and keep tab on what we do.

Postage to and from Honduras

DR. WILLIAM C. ROBERTSON of Galeras, Olancho, Honduras, has out of his heart's kindness answered many of your letters of inquiry on Honduras. Many others he has left unanswered. The reason is simple:

The postage to Honduras is 5 cents. Whenever a letter does not bear this required amount the recipient is fined about three times the postage or he can't have his letter. Further, the postage from Honduras to the United States is 8 cents. If you have not enclosed that sum in International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, can you blame Dr. Robertson for refusing to answer you?

Therefore please remember when writing Dr. Robertson:

Put a 5-cent stamp on your envelope and enclose 8 cents in International Reply Coupons. And the reply he gives you will be valuable, accurate information on present-day Honduras.

The Wild Jiveros of Ecuador

VERY little is known of these savages for the simple reason that white men who visit their country seldom return. They are frequently met trading gold dust or skins in the settlements of the Andes foothills or along tributaries of the Amazon. "Where natives can pan a little gold, whites can get tons," is the saying:

Question:—"As you are labeled South America, Ecuador, etc., I am coming to you for some information. For your benefit I have tabulated my questions as follows:

1. What is the general appearance of a Jivero as far as height, color of skin, etc., is concerned?
2. What kind of houses or huts do they live in?
3. What kind of weapons do they use?
4. Can you circumscribe the section of Ecuador in which they flourish? By that I mean, give me some directions for locating it on a map. In particular, that portion of Ecuador where there have been several white men on exploring tours who have never returned.
5. There is gold in this section. Is it to be found in stream-beds or by the pick and shovel method?"
—H. STUART MORRISON, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. A Jivero Indian is not so tall as an American. I would say the average height of the men to be about 5 feet 6 inches to 5 feet 10 inches, possibly less. They are strong-chested and have well shaped bodies, due, rumor hath it, to the fact that it is a universal custom to force vomiting with a feather in the early morning to expel all food that has remained in the stomach overnight. Their color is light brown, hair straight and black, faces round.

2. They live in communal huts of bamboo thatched with palm-leaves, the walls being woven of split bamboo, and openings left in the roof for the smoke to go out. Whole villages live in one house when the number is not too great, and in several, closely placed together, when there is a great number in one village.

3. Blow-gun with poisoned darts, bow and arrow, clubs. They also set spring bows in the paths likely to be taken by an enemy, and poison the waters of streams with the exception of what they themselves use.

4. They inhabit the region of Eastern Ecuador between the semi-civilized native districts along the G. & Q. R. R. and the town of Napo on the Napo River. They are on the upper Napo and several other of the rivers flowing into the Amazon from this portion of the republic. The parties that disappeared are said to have gone in at Rio Bamba, heading southeast.

5. I understand that the tamer Indians below the village of Napo have quite a bit of "dust" to trade, which they have panned from the sands of the smaller streams. These primitive people also practise a sort of placer-mining by putting down tiny dams in the bottoms of the streams to settle the dust after heavy rains. Usually where free gold is to be found in stream-beds good placer ground is to be located in the vicinity which will pay when put through a sluice-box in quantity.

Texas Cotton

KING COTTON has given thousands of fortunes to his planters during the past three years. Naturally the question many a farmer asks is, "Could I go South and win on a cotton plantation?" What follows is the answer. And it is well to remember that there are millions of acres of potential cotton land waiting to be reclaimed below the Mason-Dixon line:

Question:—"I wish to learn something about the climate and agriculture of Texas. My husband wants to raise cotton and thinks Limestone County is the proper place to locate. He has had experience in ranching but doesn't know much about cotton.

What would be his chance of getting work in the neighborhood in case his cotton failed? Would it be advisable for him to take his family of four, or should he locate first?

His capital is small and most of it would doubtless be needed for transportation. He would like to start this Fall. Would this be the best time of year?

What weather conditions would we find? How do they compare with Southern California?"—MRS. WALTER RAPER, Lamanda Park, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—The southern part of Texas is somewhat on the order of California in climatic conditions, etc.

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Limestone County is in a good cotton district and in nearly the geographical center of the State. The Winters are not severe in any part of Texas, except in the Panhandle section, the extreme northwestern part of the State. Timber is scarce here and the land is practically level so the northers have a full sweep in this part.

Limestone County is well timbered. The land raises from a half of a bale to a bale of cotton to the acre.

The cotton growers have met with success for several years now and so I see no reason why he should fail in his attempt.

There is plenty of other kinds of work for a man who wants to work.

I think that it would be better for him to come first and get a good place before bringing his family. You could move into your home then without being put to the necessary inconveniences of not knowing where you will stay.

There is usually about six weeks of frosty and icy weather, with sleet or snow once or twice during the period. The northers are the worst part of the Winter for the change from warm to chilly in a few hours hurts more than steady cold weather.

Your husband ought to be able to get a good place to rent for many are leaving the country for the cities, foolish moves of course; but they will wake up wiser men in a year or so and be contented on the farms.

Cotton is planted in March, hoed and chopped (that is thinned out) in April or May, ploughed two or three times before picking time in August. Usually the patch is gone over from two to three times before being laid aside. The plant blooms first, then squares form, then the bolls come and finally the bolls open and the cotton is ready to pick in a few weeks.

It takes 1,600 pounds of cotton in the field to make a 500-pound bale. The 1,100 pounds is made up of lint and seeds. Seed has been bringing from $40.00 to $60.00 per ton, the past year and the cotton from 30 cents to 40 cents per pound. The expenses are about $30.00 an acre to raise. A farmer usually rents the place on a third and fourth basis; that is, he has to plant corn and cotton and pay the rent from his production.

The Fall is a good time to come so as to get a good place to rent and get ready to break the ground for the planting season the following year. He could be ready to move in when the present tenant moves out so as not to lose time in hunting for a place when most of them are rented.

To Become a Mate

OUR merchant marine has come back to its own, taken its proud place which was surrendered during the last half of the Nineteenth Century. And it needs trained men to officer its ships. Captain Dingle gives sound advice to a Navy man who hopes to rise in his profession:

Question:—"I am going to be discharged from the Navy and I intend to ship on a merchant marine ship and try to be a mate.

What does a man have to know to become a first, second or third mate?

When would be the best plan to ship on a merchant marine ship?

Do you know where I can get some books on navigation, seamanship, and an International code book used for signals by all foreign and American merchant marine ships?"—F. E. GLEASON, U. S. S. Wisconsin.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—The chief knowledge required in mates is the simple handling of their stations in the ship. The chief mate is always stationed forward entering or leaving port; the second mate aft; the third is on the bridge with the Master. The navigational part of the various examinations is not difficult for any one able to catch the application of a few simple mathematical rules.

I think your best plan, on leaving the service, is to enter the Shipping Board employ, where, if qualified by actual service—as you undoubtedly are if admiral's cox'n—you will be given the privilege of entering the free navigation school for officers.

The navigational subjects for second or first mates are, roughly: Latitude by meridian altitude and Pole Star; longitude by sun-chronometer; day's work and all branches of dead reckoning, and the various principles of sailing combined courses; use of lead and log, in both cases common and patent; "weatherology" to a small degree; and of course, error of compass. This latter subject is only expected to be known elementarily except by a candidate for Master. You will have to know all branches of simple ship handling, of course, engine signals, lights, rule of the road, etc., but these you probably know already. Books on all the subjects you want to know about can be obtained from any nautical book store—Negus, of Water Street, New York, is a good one. Send for their prices.

Trapping in the Caribou Country

FUR prices have risen to heights undreamed, which means great reward for the man who knows how to trap. If you want to learn, Mr. Carson gives some excellent advice and points to a country rich in furbearers:

Question:—"My partner and I plan to go to British Columbia next Summer. We have the Cariboo country in mind, believing there should be good hunting and trapping there. Are we right?

What we must find out is the proper amount of money required to outfit for a trapping season, the best way into the country in question—or any other you may think better—and what sort of outfit we will require."—A. BRUEN, Collins, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—Write the Chief Game Warden, Vancouver, B. C., and get a copy of the Game Laws of British Columbia. This will tell you that no licenses are issued to non-residents of the Province. This need not stop you, however, since you can go in as homeseekers, locate a claim and file on it, and then take out your trapper's license. In order to do this you would need to get in there six months before the trapping season opened, say May first.

Fort George is no place to start from. If you go to Fort George, keep right on till you get to Finley Forks, by way of Giscome Portage. No

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railway, but a good trail to Summit Lake and water transportation the rest of the way. This is a good place to outfit, either here or Fort MacLeod.

Another good way is to go to Fort Wrangel by boat from Vancouver and go up the Stikine to Telegraph Creek or Glenora. This puts you into a good fur country and you can outfit at the Creek. Steamer all the way.

You had better have about four hundred dollars each to start with. Experienced men might do it with less, but you fellows have to pay your way till you learn.

Never lose sight of the fact that trapping requires both brains and experience. You are pitting your acquired knowledge against that which is born in the animal and you need feel no shame if he beats you once in a while. As it is, you should make the trip pay; but spend a little talk with men who know the game and see what you can learn from them before you start.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

FLOUNDERS, LILLIE (Maiden name). Marriage name either Mrs. Ernest Farnman, Mrs. Fred Smith, or Mrs. George Hankee. Dying sister wishes to see her. Last heard of in Connecticut. Any one knowing her whereabouts please communicate with L. T., No. 405, care *Adventure.*

LINN, CYRUS: Formerly U. S. S. *Bushnell.* Any one knowing him or his whereabouts please write.—Address JOHN CAMPER, 207 Beach Place, Tampa, Fla.

MOORE, FRANK KENNY K. Photographer. Was in Calgary, Canada, previous to August 4, 1914. Joined C. E. F. overseas 1915. Write your friend "SLIM." Crofton Apt. Ottawa, Canada.

BOSWORTH, EMMA L. (*née* Chappel.) Teacher who lived at 3215 Sixth Ave., Troy, N. Y. Married Mr. Alfred P. Bosworth and went to Phœnixville, Pa., in 1900. Old friend anxious to have any information of her whereabouts.—Address MRS. BERTHA V. HELM, 18 N. Albermarle St., York, Pa.

JONES, STANLEY, M. Was on H. M. S. "*Lord Nelson*" at Saloniki, Greece, in 1916, during Allied occupation. Old shipmate would like to get in touch with him. Letters addressed to Kelvin Grove, Aberystwyth, Wales, do not reach him. When last heard from (Summer 1918) was on a troop transport leaving England for Russia. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—AL. W. (YANK) PENNINGTON, 18 Winchester St., Medford, Mass.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

PERLA, CARL: Last heard of thirty-four years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address his nephew, A. N. BROOKER, 1226 Noble St., Toledo, Ohio.

KELLAM, H. S. and CHARLIE. Please write your sister. Any one knowing their whereabouts please notify.—Address MRS. G. B. MADDEN, 614 West 13th St., Kansas City, Mo.

ANDERSON, NELSON MILES. Letters returned to me from your River Falls, Wash., address. Am now with Ruth in Kansas City.—Address (Mother) MRS. H. A. ANDERSON, 3645 Main St., Kansas City.

MASTERS, OWEN JOEL. Any one knowing his whereabouts kindly inform his wife.—Address MRS. MAMIE MASTERS, 216 Brewer St., Norfolk, Va.

MARET, JOHN T. Age seventy-seven. Black eyes, and hair. Left Columbus, Texas, in 1874 accompanied by a brother George Maret, and two Burrell brothers. All going to New Mexico on horseback. George was separated from them before reaching New Mexico and found thirty-five years after in Kansas City. No trace of other three. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. ANNE MARET HACKLEY, Route 2, Stanford, Ky.

MYERS, JACK. Last heard of in Port Arthur, Texas. Please write to your old pal who sailed with you on the tug *S. B.* on the gulf—Address P. O. Box 455, Brownsville, Texas.

DOWNEY, HARRY EVANS. Forty-two years of age, weighs about 170 pounds, blue eyes, dark brown hair, height about five feet, eleven inches. Last heard of from Keeler, Calif., in 1917. Last seen in Tonopah, Nev., in August, 1919. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write his daughter.—Address MISS MARVELL DOWNEY, Mulino, Oregon.

LONGACRE, MISS FLORENCE. Met her on train bound for Denver, Colorado, July 27, 1907, and corresponded with her for more than a year. She taught school in New Mexico, in 1908. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write.—Address MRS. MABEL HUMPHREYS, 2102 Bury St., Ft. Worth, Texas.

DEMPSEY, HOWARD. Of Onset, Mass. 1911-1912 or any fellow who knew me at Squirrel Is., Me., Westboro or Winthrop, Mass. Please write.—Address FREDERIC R. BROWN, 27 Hollis St., Newton, Mass.

MAGEE, RUPERT. Last heard of on way to Poland from Brest in Battalion of Motor Mechanics. Former Sergeant Bat. F. 17 F. A.—Address K. D. SPENCER, 208 North Glenwood Ave., Peoria, Ill.

WILLIS, AMOS BRADLEY. Last heard of at Lexington, N. C. Later joined the U. S. Navy at same city. May be a printer by trade. Were good pals while at Concord, N. C. Please write your best friend. Have something very important to tell you.—Address DEWEY L. SUIT, 1821 Kenyon St., N. W. Washington, D. C.

KLEMERMAN, MAX. Left home January 18, 1919. Is fourteen years old, four feet eleven inches, and weighs ninety-five pounds. Has black hai and eyes, black mole on left jaw. Broken-hearted mother offers liberal reward to any one giving information regarding his whereabouts.—Address MRS. L. KLEMERMAN, 719 Princeton Ave., Trenton, N. J.

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BRANDLI or BRANDLEY, PAUL. (Swiss). Thirty-six years old, brown hair, blue eyes, healthy complexion, forefinger of right hand stiff. A great admirer of outdoor life, and a globe-trotter. Last heard of about four years ago with "General Delivery, Crescent City, Cal." as post-office address Brother Fred came from North Africa to find him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address KISMET, care *Adventure*.

McBRIDE, ROBT. E. Last heard of in Cripple Creek, Colo., December, 1895. Was a prospector and well known in and around Cripple Creek for many years. If any old-timers in Colo. can give any information regarding him it will be appreciated.—Address FLOYD O. BLUM, 631 Kohler St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SHOLLER, MRS. J. C. First name Jessie, has two or three children. Last heard of on Prairie Ave., Chicago, Ill. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write her brother.—Address W. R. HEARST BATTLE, 1026—22nd St., East, Kansas City, Mo.

McNEALY, LOUISE or LOTTIE-LOU. Last heard of somewhere in California. A stenographer. Has light hair. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write her brother.—W. R. HEARST BATTLE, 1026—22nd St., E., Kansas City Mo.

McNEALY, EDGAR. Last heard of in Atlanta, Ga. Left arm off just below elbow. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write his brother.—W. R. HEARST BATTLE, 1026—22nd St., East, Kansas City, Mo.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First August or Mid-August issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ARNSTEIN, JOSEPH; Bateman, Luke; Bickford, P. Brackett, Everett W.; Brownell, Herman A.; Buchanan, Charles; Burdick, Daniel Henry; Cain, Lyle; Campbell, M. V.; Carpenter; Cole, Mr. and Mrs.; Copley, Clarence L.; Darrow, Lionel; Dieterick, Martin M.; Dooley, Vincent De Paul; Dyhsma, Bartles; Elder, Alvin Wm.; Fishman, Mrs. Rose, Elizabeth and Fannie; Hoey, Pat; Hannah, C. M.; Hess, E. B.; Hooper, William H.; Hylaman, Joe; Keith, William; Keller, Byron Loring; Kennedy, James T.; Klubertanz, Captain Ferdinand A.; Larity, Albert; Lawien, Wm. J.; Light, Daniel F.; MacIntyre, Earl; Maloney, Jane; Manman, Mrs. Al or Lenna; Maxwell, Howard S.; Murphy, Dan; Powers, Jim; Roberts, Ora Frank; Rogers, Charles; Shaw, Corp. A. W.; Simpson, Miles; Stevenson Alex; Toledo Slim; Van Tilburg, Frank; Walker, Rupert; Webb, John; Whitney, Earl; Yiskis, Johnnie.

MISCELLANEOUS—Co. A. 26th Inf., Penrod, Byrd W.; McGill, Wm.; Radswapper; Dryer, Harry; Pamplum, Dusk; Mahan, Dato Chris; Bainbridge, Roger J.; Hillswock, Hal; Anderson, Curly; Moore, Howard; Moore, Overall; Lt. Rob. P. P. C. L. I.; "Paddy" Diamond U. S. 2nd Batt. 27 or 28 Regt. Inf.; Co. D. 7th Inf.; L. A. S. or J. Johnson; "Red" Thomas; Richardson, Jesse; or any old shipmates; U. S. S. *John Collins* crew of, and Ensigns.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Byron Chisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis; G. E. Hungerford; E. E. S. Atkins; E. Murphy; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; H. Higmon; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; T. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

BEATON, SGT. MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Erwin, Phil; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Gordon, W. A.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Hines, Joseph; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; McGrath, Jack W.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Martel, Leon H.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Corbett, C.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rinkenbach, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Stremple, H. E.: Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S. 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-SEPTEMBER ISSUE

In addition to the three long stories mentioned on the second contents page, the next *Adventure* will contain five short stories and the concluding instalment of the serial now running.

THE PACKETEER — ***By Samuel Alexander White***

The Hudson's Bay Company has a secret of the fur trade which the North West Fur Company must know, and the ensuing battle is one of brawn as well as of brains.

TARTARIN OF TROUBLE CREEK — ***By Charles T. Davis***

A mountain gun-lover extraordinary becomes "deppity high sheriff" and hunts trouble.

HOUN'S, HOSSES AN' HOME — ***By Romaine H. Lowdermilk***

A horse-race, cowboy style, and how it affected the fortunes of "*Snakes*" *Turner*, who rides 'em any way they come.

KINGS OF THE MISSOURI Conclusion — ***By Hugh Pendexter***

With a fortune as the prize *Jim Bridger* out-Indians the Indians.

THE WISDOM OF THE OUIJA — ***By W. C. Tuttle***

"Yaller Rock County ain't never going to take a chance on getting any more messages from departed horse-thieves." Ask *Ike Harper*—he knows why.

A QUESTION OF METHOD — ***By M. S. Wightman***

A crime that mystifies the police is made plain in the light of common sense.

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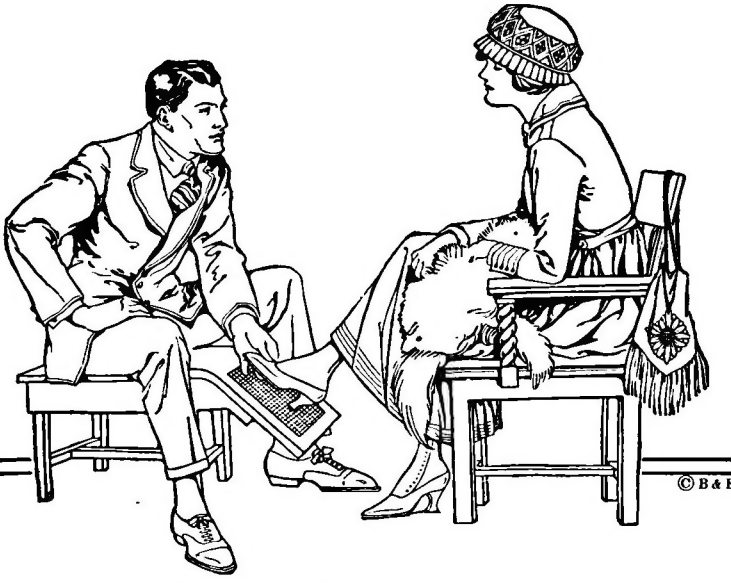

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